

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER 1979

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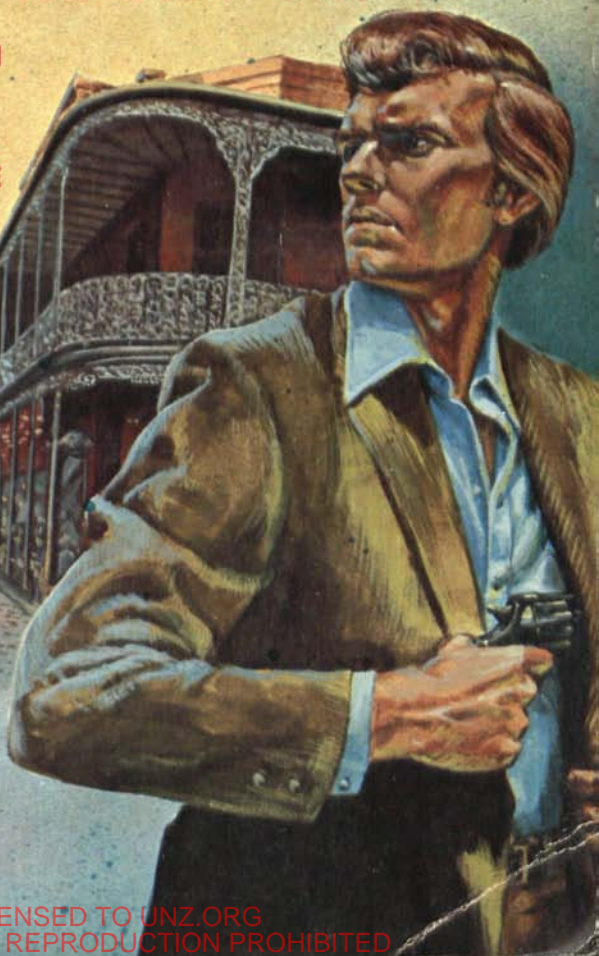
MURDER AT MARDI GRAS

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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL:

MURDER AT MARDI GRAS

by BRETT HALLIDAY

NOVEMBER 1979

VOL. 43 NO. 11

The redheaded detective leaves Miami for New Orleans to find a missing heiress. But it's not all fun and games at Mardi Gras time — it's also a bloody trail of kidnapping and murder!

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

A couple of issues ago, Larry Shaw, who replaced Sam Merwin as editor, wrote: *As the new editor of MSMM, I plan to use this page to let the writers tell you as much or as little about themselves as they wish to.*

Well, Larry has gone on to greener pastures, and as the even newer editor of MSMM I intend to use this page for the same purpose, which indicates I suspect that great editorial minds tend to run in similar grooves.

One of our contributors for this issue is MICHAEL AVALLONE, "The Fastest Typewriter in the East." The prolific Mike has written just about everything there is to write, under his own and dozens of pen names, the categories including the occult, gothics, science-fiction, adventure, and of course mysteries.

From GARY BRANDNER comes the following news: *This story will be published somewhere close to the tenth anniversary of my first. In the intervening years I have sold another 50 short stories, half a dozen articles, and 17 books. Shunning the posh Malibu Beach colony, I continue to live among the real people of the Echo Park district of Los Angeles. Hobbies include strumming a cat and petting my guitar. I favor Tanqueray martinis, and I have enough old radio programs on tape to play day and night for five days ... Oops, almost forgot to request a plug for my latest book, WALKERS, from Fawcett, due out this winter.*

And while I have your attention let me agree wholeheartedly with Larry about you, the readers, getting involved with MSMM. We try to get you the kinds of stories you like, but we're shooting in the dark unless you let us know. Send us bouquets or brickbats, tell us how you feel about stories we've run and stories and features you'd like us to use in future issues. If we get enough communications we'll start a letter column where you can sound off on your feelings.

Until next time, happy reading!

—CEF

MURDER AT MARDI GRAS

The Missing Girl Was Worth Three Million
Dollars. Mike Shayne's Assignment: Find Her —
Before Someone Else Killed Her!

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**



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FAT TUESDAY, THE DAY that precedes Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent, was just a week away and New Orleans, already boiling with tourists and those who prey upon them, was the destination of hookers from New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Stray young people were hitching rides to the Crescent City, known more familiarly as Big Easy. Con men, pickpockets or cannons, muggers, and armed robbery experts as well as bona fide tourists were bound for the second largest seaport in the United States.

Costume makers were doing their usual land office business because the week leading up to Mardi Gras is the time for masking and outrageous costumes, the more shocking the better. Fat men in diapers carrying king-sized lollipops, young women faultlessly groomed and dressed seen walking toward you but completely nude if you give them a backward glance, and who can resist?

Rex had been elected as well as his queen, the only two Mardi Gras royalties identified in the *Times Picayune*. Krewes were busy finishing the floats they had worked on since last Mardi Gras. Mothers worried about their virgin daughters during the Saturnalia just beginning (in nine months there would be an appreciable increase in the New Orleans birthrate).

Black King Zulu's barge, on which he invades the French Quarter by way of the Mississippi River, was at its berth upriver being prepared for the big event.

It was snowing in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and raining in Miami, Florida. There were no snowdrifts in Albuquerque — mountain-bred gusts of wind had only a few flakes to blow in people's faces — but it was cold.

It was warm in Miami Beach and in Miami across the bay, but the rain was coming down in torrents.

breath, filtered through the window air conditioner, smelled of salt water and tropical vegetation. Tomorrow, the Weather Bureau promised, there would be clearing skies and warm sunshine.

Out in Albuquerque, on New Mexico's high desert plateau, the weather forecast was for more light snow and colder. Marge Kinnison in a sheepskin coat, her hands thrust into the slit pockets, leaned in the doorway of her desert shack and regarded the weather outside with a frown. In the past ten years Marge had migrated to New Orleans for Mardi Gras, an annual pilgrimage to the city where she had been born and raised. It was her single brief journey into the past she wanted to forget.

This year, Marge had been determined not to make that nostalgic hegira. As a qualified and registered nurse she was needed at the Indian clinic as much during the Mardi Gras season as she was during the rest of the year. And what was left for her in New Orleans? Nothing unless you counted bitter memories.

Fat Tuesday would be Marge Kinnison's twenty-ninth birthday.

Tanned by the desert sun and caressed by hot summer winds, Marge Kinnison was a handsome woman with sea-green eyes bracketed by squint wrinkles. Her hair, worn short, was the color of desert sand. She stood erect as any man, walking and moving always with a purpose. The Indian children and their elders at the clinic worshipped Marge and called her among themselves Woman-Who-Cares.

Marge turned from the doorway back into her one-room adobe dwelling, with its single cot covered by a Navajo blanket, and picked up the telephone to dial a number.

"Pat? Kinnison here. I'm going back for Mardi Gras after all. So much for good intentions! Can you and the staff manage without me?"

Parked in front of the shack was a mud-spattered Jeep with a canvas top. Marge slid the suitcase she'd packed into the back seat. Whistling softly, she climbed behind the wheel and started the engine, turning down the rutted track that led to the highway.

Stopping at the highway, she checked the glove compartment. Binoculars, first-aid kit, the small .32-caliber automatic — all were there and neatly arranged. The snakebite kit and fifth of medicinal whiskey were in their proper place beneath the driver's seat.

A convoy of three trucks barreled past carrying Number One crude oil. A stolid black-hatted Indian, with his wife and assorted children jammed into the back seat of an old touring car, followed the trucks. Marge pulled onto the highway to follow the Indian and his family.

"No reason to stop now that I'm started," Marge said aloud to

herself. "Mardi Gras and New Orleans, here I come!"

It was high noon in Albuquerque.

II

ALONG FLAGLER STREET in Miami Beach, it was nine o'clock in the morning. With the day's mail sorted, Lucy Hamilton glanced at the expensive Swiss digital wristwatch Mike Shayne had given her last Christmas.

"You're going to be late again, Michael," she murmured to herself. "But then," she added, "you'll probably be late to your own funeral."

Punctuality, or Mike's lack of that virtue, had once been a bone of contention between Lucy and Mike, but good-natured chaffing on his part had buried that bone long ago.

"On Judgment Day, you'll be timing the Angel Gabriel's trumpet blast," Mike once told her.

"And what will you be doing?" she had retorted.

"Something equally futile," he replied with a sigh. "Counting my money and worrying about being overdrawn at the bank."

Lucy went into his office and laid the opened mail on his scarred golden-oak desk bought second-hand years ago. It had cost ten dollars. A bonus was a box of rusted paper clips. Lucy had stopped urging Mike to get rid of that desk. He was well able to afford the best office equipment, and in her foyer office Lucy had it, but Mike dubbed his office with its beaten-up file cabinets, threadbare rug, and book shelves a Shayne nephew had built for his uncle in eighth grade shop the Boar's Nest.

"And you damned well better spell that with an a," he had warned Lucy.

Lucy had learned years ago that Mike's office put certain clients instantly at ease and shocked others (the rich ones). Years ago he had explained that it was easier to bring the well-heeled out of shock than it was to gain the confidence of the poor, the grifters and the street people once they were exposed to polished walnut and executive suite decor.

"This damned office is *me*," he told her.

Lucy laid the letter from Oppenheimer, Barton and Bryan, Attorneys at Law, on top of the stack of mail. She approved any lawyers so prestigious they used 100-percent rag envelopes and letterhead stock with the firm name and address steel-die engraved. At the bottom of the letter she had written a note to Mike — *Remember the Fentress case?*

Raymond Oppenheimer had retained Mike to find the missing heirs to the Fentress fortune. As she remembered the details of that case, Lucy shuddered. But it was a missing heiress this time. It appeared to

be one of those cases Mike was apt to characterize as a piece of cake with chocolate frosting.

Lucy had added another note — *So enjoy Mardi Gras, you gay dog!*

The only clue Raymond Oppenheimer could give as to the present whereabouts of Margaret Kinnison was that every year she was seen in New Orleans by former friends and acquaintances during the week preceding the Mardi Gras parade. Oppenheimer wanted Mike Shayne to drop whatever he was currently working on and catch a plane for New Orleans.

There was an \$800,000 legacy at stake, left Margaret by her flamboyant uncle, Lloyd Kinnison, who had made his fortune in Venezuelan oil. These were the bare facts revealed in Oppenheimer's letter. The lawyer requested Shayne to get in touch with him immediately to discuss further details and arrive at a reasonable retainer for the detective's services.

Lucy was back at her desk, typing the few letters Mike had dictated late yesterday, when he came through the office door.

"Did you know it's raining?" he asked.

His trench coat was soaked, his red hair darkened by rain.

"There have been some rumors to that effect," Lucy told him. "How did you get so wet driving here from your apartment?"

"Simple," Shayne said. "I walked."

"That's interesting," Lucy replied with a smile. "Are you into walking in the rain these days?"

"When my damned Buick won't start," Mike told her.

"Dead battery again?"

He nodded.

"Because you left on the radio transmitter all night?"

He nodded sheepishly again. "And the headlights."

"You must have had a very large evening." There was just a hint of wasp sting in the last words. Mike Shayne had been doing duty as bodyguard to a wealthy widow visiting Miami Beach who had received kidnap threats.

He grinned. "She flew back to Chicago the day before yesterday, Angel. Tim Rourke and I did the town last night."

Lucy returned his good-natured grin with a smile. "Forgive the green-eyed monster — he pops up at unexpected times."

Shayne kissed her as she sat behind her desk, then asked, "What's new and different? Pete Foley wants me to go fishing with him this weekend. I can use a break."

"Read your mail," Lucy said. "Fishing with Pete you're not going."

He groaned.

"But cheer up," Lucy told him. "New Orleans and Mardi Gras beckon."

"Now that's one drunken mob scene I enjoy missing every year at this time," Shayne said. "You want to go — go."

"Read your mail, Michael," Lucy repeated. "Don't just stand there dripping on our new carpet."

When the redhead finished reading Oppenheimer's annotated letter, he placed a call to Pete Foley at the marina. "I'll have to take a rain-check, Pete. Something has just come up."

"You have it," Pete told him in a crisp voice. "What's coming down or can you tell me?"

"A missing heiress," Mike said. "I'll have to fly over to New Orleans to look for her during the Mardi Gras."

"Now I call that a really tough assignment," Pete said, adrip with sarcasm. "As I used to tell my kid sister, be good, but if you can't be good be careful. It took me most of Lent to recover from the last Mardi Gras I spent in the Crescent City."

"I'll bet it did," Mike told him. "Good fishing."

When he finished calling Pete Foley, Shayne asked Lucy to get Raymond Oppenheimer on the phone. "Shayne here," he said when she had. "I have your letter, Ray. Who am I looking for at Mardi Gras?"

"A woman by the name of Margaret Kinnison, Mike," the lawyer said. "At least that's her real name. She could be using another one now."

"Is she wanted by the police for something?" Shayne asked.

"Not that we know of," Oppenheimer said. "It's a rather complicated situation, so maybe we should sit down at lunch and discuss the matter."

"Suits me," Shayne said. "Where can I meet you?"

"The Miami Athletic Club?"

"Good," Shayne replied. "Twelve noon it is."

Finished with his Oppenheimer call, he summoned Lucy to his office. "You were right. No fishing this weekend," he told her with a self-pitying sigh. "Make me a plane reservation that will get me there sometime this evening, will you, please? Also call Tim Rourke and scrub our lunch date."

"All right, Michael." Lucy Hamilton was the efficient secretary. "What about hotel reservations? New Orleans hotels are jammed at this time of year."

"You'll have to see what you can get," Shayne said. "As handy to the French Quarter as possible."

"I'll try." Lucy looked doubtful. "Going over there at Mardi Gras time you might have to find a park bench."

"I've slept on worse," he told her.

III

MARGARET KINNISON, once on the road, had begun to have long second thoughts about driving to New Orleans for Mardi Gras. She couldn't understand the mysterious pull the city had for her at Mardi Gras time.

As a child and a young girl growing up in the Garden District that adjoins the French Quarter she had always been delighted with the dress-up foolishness of Mardi Gras. That was true. But as a woman, Margaret thought, she should be able to put childish fancies behind her.

"Well, damn it, I *have*!" she told herself. "I no longer believe in Santa Claus, there isn't a Tooth Fairy, no Easter Bunny, and Prince Charming is just any man except in the girlish eye of the beholder."

Each recent year, like this one, Margaret had sworn never again — only to pack up and go at the last possible moment.

"Because I'm dumb!" she told her reflection in the rear-view mirror. "Either that or a masochist."

She was approaching Tucumcari and snapped on the headlights. Margaret decided not to stop but to drive on to Amarillo before deciding whether or not to stay at a motel for the night.

Maybe she wouldn't stop there, either. Margaret liked following the twin shafts of her headlights through the night. It was a kind of therapy that often perplexed her.

"And I sure need a chance to sort things out," she told herself.

SKIES HAD CLEARED over Florida when Mike Shayne arrived at the Miami airport after his hour-and-a-half lunch with Raymond Oppenheimer. The short hop to New Orleans would give him a chance to sort out the information Oppenheimer had given him about Margaret Kinnison.

"It's the Lloyd Kinnison estate that we're handling through probate," Oppenheimer told Shayne over drinks at the club's staid bar. "You've heard of the Kinnison Oil Company, of course."

"I think so," Shayne said. "One of the little ones, right?"

"Right — and wrong," Oppenheimer replied. "They aren't in the

league with Standard, Texaco or Shell. They aren't multinational. In that respect, they're small potatoes, but down in Venezuela and more lately in Mexico they're very big. Kinnison was a clever operator — a hustler some oil people say — but he made a lot of money for himself and his stockholders."

"Who am I looking for?" Mike Shayne asked.

They adjourned to the spacious dining room overlooking Biscayne Bay before Oppenheimer answered that question.

"We need to find the oldest daughter of Rand Kinnison, Lloyd's older brother. She's the only surviving relative of the Kinnison brothers."

Oppenheimer told Shayne the story. Margaret Kinnison had a younger sister and brother. Rand Kinnison was the older brother of Lloyd.

"There was family money, but most of it went to Rand when their parents were killed in a car smash," Oppenheimer said. "What little — and we're talking about twenty-five or thirty thousand — Lloyd inherited, he used to do some wildcatting in Oklahoma and Texas. One out of twenty wildcat wells comes in, did you know that?"

"I've heard," Shayne admitted.

"Well, Lloyd hit that twentieth well first time out and built it into the Kinnison Oil Company," Oppenheimer said. "Pure luck. Rand, on the other hand, got into commodity futures with his inherited fortune and did fine . . . for a while. Bought an old ante-bellum house in the Garden District of New Orleans, sent his children to the most expensive private schools, joined the Krewe of Comus and one year was Rex in the Mardi Gras parade."

"Then what happened?"

"Rand speculated in tin futures about the time some new African tin mines came into production, and when the bottom dropped out of the tin market he lost his shirt."

"Isn't that pretty much par for the course when you begin dabbling in commodity futures?" Shayne asked.

"You're so very right," Oppenheimer said. "Now in this soap opera, the brothers were estranged by something that happened a long time ago. Rand eloped with Lloyd's fiancée, the woman who became Margaret's mother. Lloyd never married. When the older brother went bankrupt, he swallowed his pride and called on Lloyd for some financial help."

"Did he get it?" Shayne asked.

Oppenheimer shook his head. "No, and that precipitated the tragedy. Rand came home to the old house in the Garden District of New Orleans

one rainy afternoon and killed his wife and the younger children, then blew out his brains. Margaret was away at Vassar."

THE JETLINER WAS SKIMMING across the Gulf of Mexico toward New Orleans International at 29,000 feet.

"Drink, sir?" the hostess in the first-class section of the 747 asked.

"Brandy on the rocks." The girl's smile had a bit more warmth to it than was professionally required, so Shayne returned it with one of his own. "Martell if you have it."

"I believe we do, sir."

While she was gone he remembered Oppenheimer telling him that Margaret Kinnison had dropped out of sight after burying her brother, sister and parents.

"Have you tried reaching her through Social Security?" Mike asked.

Oppenheimer nodded. "Nothing. That she comes to Mardi Gras every year is the only lead we have."

"Where did you get that lead?" Mike asked.

"From an aunt on her mother's side of the family — a Mrs. Loretta Sweeney. Lloyd Kinnison left her a small bequest. She's a widow and lives at the Monteleone Hotel in the French Quarter."

"Has she actually seen her niece at Mardi Gras?" Shayne asked. "If she has, it seems to me . . ."

"When she comes to New Orleans every year, Margaret phones her aunt," Oppenheimer interrupted. "Mrs. Sweeney hasn't seen Margaret since the funeral about ten years ago."

"That's the only lead you can give me?"

"As a teenage girl Margaret wanted to be a nurse," said Oppenheimer. "Her mother and father insisted she go to Vassar. She vowed when she was twenty-one that she would take up nursing as a profession. We have this from Mrs. Sweeney."

"Have you done any following up of that lead?" Shayne asked. "Checked with nursing schools, the register of trained nurses and so on?"

"Yes. No results. That's why we're batting the ball into your court."

"Which means our missing heiress has changed her name," Shayne said in gloomy tones. "Great! I'd prefer trying to find a penny on the bottom of Lake Ponchartrain. Chances of success would be better."

"For a month, we've run personal ads in all the leading metropolitan dailies. No results except from crackpots, and there sure are a lot of those kicking around out there!"

"Pictures?" Shayne asked.

Oppenheimer passed across the table a copy of a snapshot. "From Mrs. Sweeney, bless her," he said. "Margaret was her favorite niece."

A fresh-faced girl in some sort of school uniform was smiling into the camera. Shayne pocketed it. "How much money is involved here?" he asked Oppenheimer.

"At a conservative estimate, the estate is worth three million in Kinnison Oil Company stock, bearer bonds, real estate holdings and cash in the bank."

Mike whistled softly. "Is that before or after taxes?"

"After."

"Nice little nestegg," Shayne commented. "Tell me this, Ray. Who collects if I can't find Margaret Kinnison?"

"Well, if you can't and she doesn't show up to claim her legacy within seven years, the Lloyd Kinnison Foundation for Alternate Energy Sources collects half the bounty. The rest goes to the Institute for Marine Research at Coral Gables," Oppenheimer said.

"And if she's deceased?" Mike asked.

"On proof of death, the Institute and Foundation collect immediately."

"I've never heard of either outfit," Mike confessed.

"The Foundation is a new one — sort of a tax shelter deal that was Lloyd Kinnison's baby. A Doctor Mike Lambert heads it up. Have you ever heard of him?"

Shayne shook his head.

"He started out as one of Newman's Raiders, that wild-eyed outfit that made Ralph Nader look like an arch-conservative when it comes to protecting the consumer against himself. They faded about a year ago, then Lambert got an inside track with Lloyd Kinnison and persuaded him to set up the Energy Sources Foundation."

"What about the Institute for Marine Research?" Mike Shayne asked.

"Fred Graves heads up that one," Oppenheimer told him. "They have some strange ideas about putting the sea floor to agricultural use. It's a shoestring operation so far."

"Graves . . ." Mike mused. "Isn't he the man who used to dive on Spanish treasure galleons, when and if he could locate a wreck?"

Oppenheimer nodded. "The same Fred Graves."

IV

SHAYNE FINISHED THE MARTELL on the rocks the stewardess had brought him and, when she asked, said he'd have another. "You can skip the inflight meal," he told her. "I'll eat in New Orleans."

And after that, he thought, I'll find myself a park bench in some quiet neighborhood.

Every New Orleans hotel Lucy had called was booked solid with a waiting list through Mardi Gras. Mike wondered where Margaret Kinnison planned to stay if she was coming to Mardi Gras this year.

The stewardess brought Mike's second drink. "Do you know New Orleans, Mr. Shayne?" she asked.

"Not well," he admitted. "I've been there once or twice, but only for a few days during Superbowl Weekend."

"You a football player?"

"Was," he said.

The girl hesitated, blushing slightly, then said in a voice different from that she used to address the other first-class passengers, "I lay over a few days in New Orleans, Mr. Shayne."

For the first time, he really saw her. She was a very trim five-two or three with honey-blond hair and sky-blue eyes. A slightly tilted nose gave a vague impudence to her face with its tanned complexion. The mouth was full-lipped and hinted at a passionate nature.

"You must know the city very well then," he hazarded.

"Indeed I do," the girl said.

From the name tag on her flight jacket, Shayne saw this was *Hazel French*.

"Would you have dinner with me? You pick the place," Mike told her.

"I'm not supposed to date passengers," Hazel whispered.

"When I deplane, I'm no longer a passenger," he said.

"I never thought of that."

He smiled faintly. "The hell you didn't. Where do we meet?"

"Galatoire's?"

He nodded. "Time?"

"Seven o'clock. I'll make reservations. It's supposed to be first come, first served there, but the maitre d' is a good friend. He'll sneak us in ahead of the line."

"Good. It's a date," he said.

When the stewardess moved along to serve the other first-class passengers he admired the way her tailored uniform accented her curves, at the same time feeling a twinge of conscience. Should Hazel ask him to spend the night, it would temporarily take care of the lack of hotel accommodations, however.

MARGARET KINNISON WAS NEARING Wichita Falls, Texas, when she dozed off for a moment at the wheel. The Jeep swerved and its tires scattered gravel on the shoulder of the highway. Snapped awake, Margaret skillfully got the vehicle back under control, but told herself,

"Time to get in off the road, girl, before you kill yourself."

Topping a rise in the road, she saw the lighted sign ahead that read, *Resteasy Motel*. Beneath it another sign flashed, *Vacancy*.

Margaret slowed and turned into the wide drive between the units, stopping outside the office.

"A single, please," she told the sleepy-eyed night clerk.

He reached for a key and turned the register for her to sign. In a firm but feminine hand she wrote: *Kinnison Moreland, Albuquerque*.

"Two-C down the court, Miss Moreland," the clerk told her.

Margaret thanked him. Within minutes she had stripped and was letting a hot shower ease the aches and pains of a long day's drive.

Maybe next year, she thought, I can afford a comfortable little compact sedan as well as my Jeep.

Holding that thought, Margaret drifted off to sleep.

IN NEW ORLEANS HAZEL FRENCH, as good as her word, met Mike Shayne on the Bourbon Street sidewalk outside Galatoire's where the line of waiting people stretched to the corner. She had changed from her uniform to an evening pants suit that was pink and flattered her upswept blond hair.

"Follow me and ask no questions," she said.

She led him to an alley and he entered after her. They went through the steaming kitchen to reach the dining room where the maitre d' led them to a small table for two. Outside Mike could see the line of patiently waiting people.

"Is this satisfactory, Mr. Shayne?" the maitre d' asked. "It is said that Galatoire's will not reserve a table for the president of these United States, and this is true. But when my sister asks, who am I to say no?"

Mike slipped a crisp twenty-dollar bill into the man's hand.

"This is not necessary," Hazel's brother protested, but the bill disappeared into his jacket pocket when he snapped his fingers for a waiter.

"You look like a steak and potatoes man, Mr. Shayne," Hazel told him, "but I would like to suggest trout Marguery. It is one of the specialties of Galatoire's."

"Trout?" Shayne was taken aback. The last trout he had tasted was years ago when he went on a solitary fishing and camping trip in Ontario's Quetico National Forest. "That's a cook-out fish."

Hazel laughed, and it was a trilling little laugh. "I'm sorry," she apologized, "but here in New Orleans trout is a specialty. Trout Marguery is cooked with other seafood, especially shrimp, and there's a rich white sauce you wouldn't believe, so try it, Mr. Shayne."

"I will," he promised, "if you'll call me Mike."

Hazel offered him her small hand across the table. "Glad to meet you, Mike." In almost the same breath she asked, "Who are you and what do you do? You're carrying a weapon."

Because he paid his tailor good money to tailor his sports jackets so the bulge of a holstered .45 Colt under his left arm wouldn't show, Mike was discomfited.

Hazel read his thoughts. "Don't worry, it isn't *that* obvious. I happen to know you checked it with our flight captain before you boarded. Are you an FBI man, Mike?"

"I haven't that pleasure," Shayne told her. "I'm a private investigator." He fished out one of his business cards and handed it to Hazel. "Should you ever need me, God forbid, get in touch."

"Have you come to Mardi Gras on a case or should I ask that?" Hazel said.

"How is your memory for faces?" Mike asked.

"Pretty good." Elbow on the table, chin on her hand, Hazel regarded Mike with those sky-blue eyes. "Why do you ask?"

He removed the young-girl picture of Margaret Kinnison from his wallet and passed it across to Hazel. "She'd be about ten years older now. Has anyone vaguely resembling her flown with you during the past few weeks?"

Hazel picked up the picture and studied it. She shook her head. "I can't be sure. Does a name go with this picture?"

"Margaret Kinnison."

"No. I'd remember that last name if it was ever on our passenger list. It's . . . well, different." Hazel handed the picture back to Mike. "What has she done?"

"Nothing criminal," he said. "Just disappeared."

The waiter brought their food. Although she had steered Mike to the trout Marguery, Hazel had ordered pompano. "I can't ever get enough of it," she confessed. "I think New Orleans is the only place they know how to prepare pompano."

Shayne ordered a white Chablis to go with their fish.

When they had finished dinner, Hazel asked Shayne where he was staying.

"This is a sudden trip," he told her. "I couldn't get any kind of reservation. I'm going to have to get hold of a cab driver and ask his advice. There must be a bed someplace in this town regardless of Mardi Gras!"

It was still early evening and they were strolling Bourbon Street arm

in arm. The crowd excitement that mounts to a frenzy by Fat Tuesday was already becoming apparent. Bourbon Street bars with their exotic strippers and fast, heavy-beat music that rent the night's quiet were going full blast, jammed with people, young and old.

"You won't find anything," Hazel told him. "This year Mardi Gras is bigger than ever." She hesitated, then asked, "Are you married, Mike Shayne?"

"No, I'm not," he answered.

"But you have a woman friend, of course," Hazel said. "I know my sex. They don't leave men like you walking around free as air."

"I have a very good woman friend who works for me," Shayne confessed. "But she's in Miami Beach and I'm here in New Orleans."

Hazel stopped walking. "My God! I've met an honest man!"

He laughed. "It's just that I don't lie well, Hazel."

She had made up her mind. "I share one of the Pontalba apartments with two other stews, but they're both working tonight. Ruth is in Rome and Gladys is out in San Francisco. You're welcome to stay with me, Mike. If you want you can sleep on the couch in the living room."

"I accept your invitation," he said, "but don't you think I'm a bit oversize to sleep on the couch?"

Hazel laughed and took his arm. "I like you, Shayne. Let's go home."

V

IN THE RESTEASY MOTEL, Margaret Kinnison was having a too familiar nightmare. She was in the Garden District house and both her father and mother were chasing her from room to room, her father with a gun, her mother with a butcher knife. As she frantically tried to escape, she kept stumbling over the corpses of her brother and sister.

The worst part of it was that both Margaret's father and mother begged her to stop running so they could kill her. She awakened bathed in cold sweat and sat up to get her breath and smoke a cigarette.

A glance at her watch told Margaret she had been asleep three hours. It was enough to take the edge off her driving nerves and she was afraid to go back to sleep. Margaret dressed and stepped out of her motel unit to resume her journey in the Jeep to New Orleans.

"This year I'm going to see Aunt Loretta at the Monteleone," she resolved.

It was time, she decided, to lay that ghost to rest. After all *someone* had to bear the bad tidings of the suicide murders. It was a long time ago now, and maybe she had just imagined Aunt Loretta wished she had been killed instead of her mother.

Margaret decided to look up Aunt Loretta as soon as she reached New Orleans, which would be sometime late tomorrow.

IN THE EARLY MORNING LIGHT shafting through the bedroom windows of Hazel's apartment, Mike Shayne raised himself on an elbow, to regard the sleeping face of Hazel French. She was a pretty woman but, without makeup and in the first light of day, he realized she was older than he had thought last night.

Without disturbing Hazel, he got out of the large bed and in boxer shorts padded toward the kitchen to fix coffee and find something for their breakfast. To reach the kitchen, he had to pass through the living room.

"Hello, Haze!" A uniformed woman burst through the front door and trapped Shayne in the living room. "What do you think? I have three days . . ."

Brown eyes finally registered that this wasn't Hazel but a tall and very husky redheaded man in boxer shorts standing in the middle of the apartment. With a perfectly straight face she asked, "Are you going to bed or getting up?"

"Getting up." Shayne flushed beet red.

"How nice!" The auburn-haired woman about Hazel's age crossed to Mike and extended a cool hand. "I'm Miriam. Who are you?"

"Shayne — Mike Shayne."

"Miriam Hadley."

They shook hands.

"Excuse me," he said. "I'll just slip into something a little more conventional."

"Don't mind little old me," Miriam said in an airy voice. "I'm one of Hazel's roommates," she added. "Audrey is the prig in this liberated trio, and she's laying over in Rome today and tomorrow."

VI

SHAYNE FOUND A HOTEL ROOM with ridiculous ease after he left the Pontalba Apartments. He flagged a cab, stated his needs to the driver, was whisked to Lafayette Square in the French Quarter, and the clerk of the Lafayette Hotel, when he asked for a room, turned the register for him to sign and reached for a key.

"Baggage?" he asked with a cocked eyebrow.

Shayne showed the black leather toilet article container and said, "I travel light. Do you take Visa?"

"Of course."

Shayne took the elevator alone to the fourth floor room and bath

that overlooked St. Charles Street. After showering and shaving, he went down to the coffee shop for the breakfast he didn't get at the Pontalba. It wasn't that Hazel French hadn't offered to fix it for him, but Shayne was too embarrassed to sit down at the table with Hazel and her roommate.

It was after breakfast that he planned to walk to the Monteleone Hotel on Jackson Square with its bronze statue of Old Hickory mounted on his favorite horse in order to see Mrs. Loretta Sweeney. He would ask her to notify him immediately if her niece phoned.

Good as it tasted, trout didn't stay with him, Shayne discovered, like steak and potatoes. So he ordered a breakfast of steak and eggs with hot biscuits in the coffee shop of the Lafayette. With breakfast under his belt, the neatly made hotel bed looked inviting since he had not managed much sleep last night.

He dropped down on it dressed but for his shoes, decided Aunt Loretta could be interviewed that afternoon instead of that morning and, within moments, was sound asleep.

Later he was to tell Lucy Hamilton, "That was the most expensive morning nap I ever took!"

The ringing telephone woke him, and he was startled to see it was ten to twelve by his digital watch. "Long distance calling, Mr. Shayne," the hotel switchboard operator told him in a cheerful voice. "A Mr. Raymond Oppenheimer. He says that it's important."

"Put him on."

"Shayne?"

He cleared his throat to get the sleep out of his voice. "Talking, Ray."

"Listen, Mike, something has come up in this Margaret Kinnison matter. I've had calls from both the Energy Sources Foundation and the Marine Research people. They have retained a local private investigation firm to locate Margaret. I hadn't advised them I had employed you."

"Isn't that odd, Ray?" Shayne asked. "They should be more interested in *not* finding her with all that money at stake."

"Unusual," Oppenheimer said, "but they have valid reasons."

"Such as?"

"Both foundations want to expedite the probate of the will. A codicil has showed up in one of Lloyd Kinnison's safe deposit boxes. Margaret only inherits half the estate if and when she's located. The other million and a half is to be split between the two foundations. Lambert and Graves got together to hire this New Orleans Investigator."

"Ray, something smells here," Mike said.

"No," Oppenheimer assured him. "We think of these various foundations as soulless entities, but they're not. Lambert and Graves have devoted their professional lives to the Energy Resources Foundation and the Institute for Marine Research. Both deals are short of money, thanks to inflation. To keep operating, they're willing to settle for half of three million now rather than the whole amount seven years from now."

"In seven years," Mike acknowledged, "maybe you'll need three million to buy a loaf of bread and a newspaper."

"Exactly."

"All right, Ray. Are you pulling me off this case?"

"By no means. We didn't talk money over lunch yesterday, but this morning I mailed Miss Hamilton a check for a thousand up-front money. We'll agree on the balance when you get back."

"Nice doing business with you folks," Shayne said. "What am I supposed to do over here with local PI's into the act?"

"I've talked with both Lambert and Graves. We agree you're to cooperate with them. The man to contact is Grigsby Tallent." Oppenheimer gave Mike an address on Magazine Avenue in the Quarter. "He'll be expecting you."

"Interesting name," Shayne commented. "Sounds like something out of Charles Dickens."

"Fred Graves assures me they're a reputable outfit," Oppenheimer said.

VII

WHEN THE LAWYER HUNG UP, Mike sat on the side of the bed staring at the telephone. While talking with Oppenheimer his original skepticism had dissolved, but now it was back as he wondered what non-profit organizations who hired private investigators told the IRS. Shayne knew he sold his services for top dollar and suspected Tallent did the same. Should he locate Margaret Kinnison, Ray Oppenheimer would be looking at a \$5,000-plus expenses bill, at least.

Twice before, Mike had tried cooperating with other investigators. It had invariably been a traumatic experience. He didn't look forward to trying to do it again, but Ray Oppenheimer was calling the plays. Mike Shayne would try to be a team player.

He took a cab to the Magazine Avenue address Oppenheimer had given him. Grigsby Tallent's office was on the ground floor of a restored brick ante-bellum building, and on the plate glass window in fancy

scroll work it said — *Grigsby Tallent Confidential, Inc.* Nothing more.

"Real class operation," Shayne muttered under his breath before stepping into the foyer with its deep-pile carpet and lacquered blond receptionist:

"I'm here to see Grigsby Tallent," he told the young woman.

"Do you have an appointment?" She disapproved of his plaid sports coat and scuffed loafers. "Mr. Tallent only sees people by appointment, Mr. . . . ?"

"Shayne. Mike Shayne. He's expecting me."

She glanced down at the appointment book on her desk. "I don't see your name here, Mr. Shayne."

Mike pointed to the telephone on her polished desk. "Why don't you ask him if he wants to see me?"

"Mr. Tallent doesn't like to be disturbed."

Shayne tried to curb his rising temper. "So disturb him just this once."

A professional smile disclosed evenly capped teeth with a lipstick stain on one that detracted a great deal from the smile. "I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne. Call Mr. Tallent for an appointment. If your business is important enough, he'll probably see you within the next few days."

Mike handed her a clean handkerchief. "Wipe the lipstick off your teeth?" he suggested. "It mars your plastic beauty."

He rounded the desk and headed for the frosted glass door that said: *Grigsby Tallent, Private.*

"Mr. Shayne!" Handkerchief in hand, the receptionist tried to head him off. Taking her elbows, Mike Shayne carefully lifted her out of his way and set her back down. "You son of a bitch!" the girl exploded.

It was too much. He stopped, turned and said, "Good girl. I didn't know you had it in you. *Here.*" He took the handkerchief from her hand. "Open wide."

Stunned, she bared her teeth. He carefully cleaned away the lipstick, pocketed the handkerchief, and said, "Now be a good girl."

He swung open the door to Grigsby Tallent's private office.

"Who are you?" Tallent rose from his desk chair. "What business do you have breaking in like this?"

Mike took a long moment to admire the decor. Oak paneling, English hunting prints on the walls, a small bar, carpets nearly ankle deep, green the key color. Green carpet, green curtains and drapes, green leather padding on the front and sides of the massive desk facing the door.

"Kindly state your business," Tallent said.

"I'm Shayne from Miami," the redhead said. He was talking to a

middle-aged man with Gladstone whiskers, modishly styled iron-gray hair, deeply tanned, wearing a tailored green silk suit that must have cost at least \$500. "We're to work together on the Margaret Kinnison thing."

"Oh yes — Shayne." Tallent spoke as if something about the name secretly amused him. "Michael Shayne, is it?"

"You have it," Shayne said.

"Won't you sit down?" A spotlight was cleverly concealed in the ceiling so it bathed Tallent's impressive figure with soft light. He waved a manicured hand toward one of the deep green leather chairs facing his desk. "I'll be glad to discuss the Kinnison matter with you, but I'm afraid you're wasting your time. Within days, my organization will have located her."

"Glad to hear it." Shayne tried to make it sound sincere but didn't quite manage. "You must have a very efficient organization, Tallent."

Mike was staying on his feet.

Tallent waved a hand toward the bar. "Would you care to mix yourself a drink? It's the least I can do after your coming over here from Miami on a wild-goose chase."

"No thanks."

"Well . . . ?"

"So much for cooperation, Tallent," Shayne said in an even voice. "Are you a betting man?"

"Occasionally."

"I'll gamble a grand that I locate Margaret Kinnison before your efficient organization does."

Mirrored in Tallent's eyes were doubt and indecision, so Mike knew his ploy was going to pay off. Tallent had no more information about Margaret's whereabouts than he did and probably didn't know about Aunt Loretta. She was Mike's trump.

"Do we have a bet?" he asked Tallent.

"I've heard you're somewhat . . . unconventional," Tallent said in a voice that told Mike to substitute crude for unconventional. His humorless and unfriendly smile glittered in the spotlight. "We do have a bet, Shayne. It will be a pleasure to take your money. Now would you please leave? I'm a busy man."

"On my way," Mike said.

In the foyer, he found the sleek receptionist powdering her nose and inspecting her teeth in her compact mirror. She looked up at Shayne with a subtle invitation in her stare that he chose to ignore.

"Enjoy Mardi Gras," he told her and stepped out into the street.

He walked the two-and-a-half blocks to the Lafayette Hotel. He admired the soft light that flattered the old buildings of the Quarter even at midday, light whose softness is caused by the moisture that is always in the air, even on the sunniest summer days.

Heat wrapped him up like a hot sheet in a steam bath. He was going to need extra underwear and socks. He decided to eat at the hotel and cross the river that afternoon to shop in downtown New Orleans before he visited Aunt Loretta . . .

MARGARET KINNISON, when she had driven through Louisiana's capital city, Baton Rouge, pulled over to have a late lunch at a restaurant featuring fresh-caught catfish before tackling the 23-mile causeway across Lake Ponchartrain. Her throat was parched from too many cigarettes, and her back ached, but being so close to New Orleans after so many hours of steering the Jeep lifted her spirits and morale.

As in other years, she had wired Bess Lynch, the black woman who was governess for the Kinnison children, to let her know she was coming for Mardi Gras. One of Bess' good meals and a warm bed seemed like a foretaste of heaven to Margaret. But she'd pay her call on Aunt Loretta at the Monteleone first.

VIII

SHOPPING IN NEW ORLEANS took up most of the afternoon for Shayne. When he returned to the Lafayette Hotel it was quarter of five. From his room, he called the Monteleone and asked for Mrs. Loretta Sweeney.

"Yes?" said a small voice when the switchboard put him through to her room. "Who is this?"

"Ma'am, my name is Michael Shayne and I'm from Miami," Shayne said in his warmest voice. "I wonder if I could have a few minutes of your time this evening?"

"Are you an insurance salesman?" She didn't wait for him to answer. "If you are you can't sell me any at my age."

"I'm not selling insurance."

"It won't do you any good to sell me a cemetery plot, Mr. Change. I already have one in St. Louis. Number Two beside my husband, bless his departed soul."

"Shayne," he said. "S-h-a-y-n-e. I want to see you concerning your niece, Margaret Kinnison."

"Margaret? Are you a friend of hers?"

"We haven't met yet, but I want to be." Shayne wished he had gone directly to the Monteleone instead of calling first. "May I have a few minutes of your time this evening?"

"Why do you want to see me if you're interested in Margaret?" the elderly woman wanted to know.

He heaved a patient sigh. "I need to find Margaret," he confessed. "She has a great deal of money coming from the estate of her uncle, Lloyd Kinnison."

"Lloyd was no good," Mrs. Sweeney said with conviction. "Neither was his brother Rand, come to that. It's no wonder Margaret changed her name. Why would Lloyd, if he's dead, want to leave my niece money? Because he was so tight-fisted my sister is dead and also my niece and nephew, poor dear children!"

"How do you know that Margaret Kinnison has changed her name?" Shayne asked. He was instantly alert. "Have you seen her?"

"Why, yes. She left only a few minutes ago to go where she will stay for Mardi Gras."

"Where is that?"

"You're an impertinent young man, Mr. Change."

"Mrs. Sweeney, this is important to your niece," he protested. "I've flown here from Miami to find her. Any help you can give me in locating Miss Kinnison will certainly be appreciated. Did she tell you where she will be staying?"

"I'm afraid we didn't discuss that. It's been a long time since I saw Margaret. She has grown into a handsome young woman."

Mike Shayne felt he had no choice, that he had to see Mrs. Sweeney. She was elderly and perhaps her mind wandered. Yet he was convinced, whether she knew it or not, that Mrs. Sweeney could give him a clue to Margaret Kinnison's whereabouts.

Some sixth sense had begun to set off little alarm bells in his mind since his interview with Grigsby Tallent. From his rival's regal office, Shayne suspected he commanded a shadowy army of investigators. Out of years of experience, he knew there were many in his profession who were blackmailers, extortionists and others no better than guns for hire.

Only last year a man describing himself as a private investigator and duly licensed had been indicted in Dade County for accepting money from a woman to kill her husband. He had tried to earn his pay, too. It wasn't his fault the husband crawled two miles carrying two bullets and subsequently recovered.

"I'm sure Margaret has," he said, "and she's a very fortunate woman if I can find her here in New Orleans. I'm begging for your help, Mrs. Sweeney."

"Well, young man, if that's the way it is, come see me tomorrow morning. I'm at my best then, you know."

"Yes, Ma'am, what time?"

"You sound like a sincere young man. Come at nine and we'll have breakfast in my room. I hardly go out any more, even down to the restaurant or lobby."

"Thank you, Mrs. Sweeney, I'll be there at nine sharp."

It was then, so to speak, that Mrs. Sweeney dropped the other shoe.

"You'll see from the lovely picture of herself that Margaret brought me what a handsome young woman she has become, Mr. Change."

Before he could answer, Mrs. Sweeney broke the connection.

With time on his hands, Mike Shayne placed another call, this one to Lucy Hamilton. It was too late to reach her at the office, so he called her apartment.

"Angel, Mike here," he said. "What's coming down over there?"

"About time you called me, Irish," Lucy told him in a petulant voice.

"I thought you would as soon as you arrived. What was the attraction?"

Because he was guilty, he was too flustered to answer that question.

"Look, Lucy, will you run some sort of check on the Lloyd Kinnison Foundation for Alternate Energy Sources and the Institute for Marine Research? Just a general sort of thing. A Dr. Max Lambert heads up the first organization, a Fred Graves the second."

"First thing in the morning," Lucy said, businesslike now. "Where can I reach you?"

Shayne told her the hotel. "Leave a message for me to call back if I'm not in my room," he said.

"Do you smell a rat?" Lucy asked.

"I just don't know," he told her. "The two of them have hired a high-powered private investigator over here named Grigsby Tallent to locate Margaret Kinnison. We're supposed to cooperate but that won't work."

"Strange," Lucy commented. "If they or you *do* find her, it will cost them a million and a half."

"Oppenheimer buys the half-a-loaf theory rather than waiting seven years to collect, but I don't — not quite. Let's say I have a suspicious nature."

"I'm with you," Lucy told him. "I'll relay the information you want as soon as possible."

IX

MIKE SHAYNE WAS TO LIST Mrs. Loretta Sweeney among the most likely-to-be-remembered characters met during his career as a private investigator. He went to the Monteleone Hotel expecting to meet a petite senior citizen wearing a shawl.

Miss Lott, a gray-haired and colorless private nurse, admitted him to the top floor suite of rooms occupied by Mrs. Sweeney.

"She's very bright and alert this morning, Mr. Change," Miss Lott confided before showing him into the bedroom. "When you talked with her yesterday afternoon, she was playing her helpless little-old-lady role. Don't be too surprised."

"I'll try not to be," he said. "Is she an actress?"

"Was an actress," Miss Lott told him. "A fine actress in her time, I've been told."

Instead of a shawl Mrs. Loretta Sweeney wore a lovely pink bed jacket and was sitting in the biggest bed (with a canopy!) that Shayne had ever seen. She must have been deep into her seventies, but her aquiline face still showed vestiges of beauty. Pure white hair framed her face.

"Come in, Mr. Shayne, come in," she invited in a voice two octaves lower than the one she had used yesterday while talking with Shayne on the phone. Miss Lott hovered behind Mike at the room door. "You will tell Mary what you would like for breakfast. You can see what I'm forced to eat."

On her tray were a dish of prunes, a bowl of oatmeal and a cup of tea.

"Eggs scrambled, toast and coffee," Shayne told the nurse.

"Also lamb chops for him, Mary, and wouldn't you prefer hot biscuits to toast?" Mrs. Sweeney asked. "A man your size needs something that will stick to the ribs, by God!"

"Biscuits instead of toast," Shayne told Mary Lott.

While she was phoning the order down to room service in another room of the suite, Mrs. Sweeney regarded him carefully with sea-green eyes that had lost none of their sparkle.

"You are a *big* one," she commented. "Now what's all this fuss and feathers about Lloyd Kinnison, damn his soul; and my niece?"

Mike Shayne related the provisions of Lloyd Kinnison's will and the fact that Oppenheimer had retained him to find her at Mardi Gras. "I can use any help you can give me," he finished. "And thanks for finally getting my name right."

Loretta Sweeney chuckled. "I knew it all the time," she confessed. "People cherish their names. Keep getting a name wrong and you knock the owner a bit off-balance. It's a cruel little game I play."

"You said she brought you a picture," Mike prompted.

Loretta Sweeney pointed. "On the dresser."

He went over to study and memorize the face of the young woman in Levi's, white shirt and boots, posed, smiling and with a hand raised to shield her eyes from the sun, in some desert locale.

"Handsome young woman, isn't she?" Mrs. Sweeney said from the bed.

"She certainly is," he agreed. "Did she say where this was taken?"

"I didn't ask," Loretta Sweeney told him. "Margaret has her life, I have what's left of mine. We don't ask each other questions."

Something in the way she spoke convinced Shayne Mrs. Sweeney wasn't being evasive.

The photograph was an 8x10 sepia enlargement from a snapshot mounted in a leather frame.

"May I have a look at the back of this photograph?" he asked Mrs. Sweeney.

"If you wish," she said.

He turned it over and carefully removed it from the frame. *Fox Photo Finishers, Albuquerque, New Mexico* and a number, 809652, were stamped on the back of the enlargement. He slipped the photo back into the frame and set it up on the dresser again.

Miss Lott preceded a room-service waiter who set up the redhead's breakfast tray on a stand and poured his coffee from a silver urn.

"Eat, young man, and talk later," Mrs. Sweeney commanded. When Miss Lott was gone, she said, sotto voice, "Have you a cigarette?"

Mike offered his pack. She took two, hiding one under the pillows. "For later," she said with a wink.

Shayne ate his breakfast.

"Can you give me any sort of clue as to where Margaret might be staying in the city?" he asked.

"I asked her to stay here with me but she said that she had other plans, that Bess was expecting her," Loretta Sweeney told him. She had fitted the cigarette he had given her into a cigarette holder similar to the one Franklin Roosevelt used with such a jaunty air. "Bess who? I don't know. A school chum, I suppose."

"What sort of things was she interested in as a child?" Shayne asked.

"Dolls, that sort of thing. What girl child isn't?"

"Did she ever mention what she wanted to be when she grew up?" he asked.

Mrs. Sweeney blew a series of oval smoke rings, closing one eye to admire them. "Sir Laurence taught me how to do that," she bragged. "He hadn't been knighted then. We were playing Shakespeare in the English provinces and damned near starved to death." She sighed. "What was that question again?"

"What do you know about Margaret's ambitions?" Mike said patiently.

"Oh, the usual little girl thing, she wanted to be an actress like Aunt Loretta, a movie star, oh yes, a nurse. I remember that well because I used to read to the children. The story of Florence Nightingale quite set Margaret on fire."

"Mrs. Sweeney, I'm at the Lafayette Hotel," he told her, getting up to go. "I'd appreciate it, should Margaret call, if you'd ask her to get in touch with me. She's inherited three million dollars. You can tell her that."

Loretta Sweeney whistled softly. "Lloyd was *that* filthy rich?"

"It seems that he was," Mike said. "Thanks for the breakfast — it's sticking to my ribs."

"Mr. Michael Shayne," Mrs. Sweeney told him with a lewd wink, "if I was fifty years younger, you wouldn't get out of my bedroom so easily."

Shayne laughed. "I can well believe it." Bending over the bed, he kissed her forehead.

"I hope you find Margaret," she told him. "I suspect she needs a man like you in her life."

X

BACK AT HIS HOTEL, Mike Shayne phoned the Albuquerque photographer who had enlarged the snapshot for Margaret Kinnison. After identifying himself, he asked the man to please check back through his files and tell him who had ordered the work.

"Gladly, Mr. Shayne," the man said. "This must be important, if you're calling from New Orleans."

"It certainly is for the young woman in that photograph," Shayne said.

Within moments the photographer was back on the phone. "A Miss Kinnison Moreland ordered that enlargement," he said. "She's a good customer of ours."

Shayne had the feeling a gambler gets when he beats two pair to take a pot with three of a kind, or pulls the handle on a slot machine for the hundredth time to hit the jackpot.

"By the way, where does she work these days?" he asked.

"I believe she's a nurse at the Navajo Mission Hospital here," the photographer said. "Yes, I'm sure of it. A very nice young woman indeed."

So there it was.

Shayne realized he could earn his retainer from Oppenheimer by reporting this new knowledge. The lawyer could take the investigation from there, but the redhead wanted to be completely sure of his facts.

To confirm what the photographer had told him, Mike placed a call to

the Navajo Mission Hospital, asking for either the administrator or the doctor in charge.

"That would be Doctor Patrick Long," said the girl who had taken his call. "He's in surgery this morning. Can he call you back?"

"If he would be so kind," Mike said. "It's with regard to Miss Kinnison Moreland."

"Now I'm *sure* Doctor Long will call you," the girl told him.

Shayne went down to the hotel bar to wait after telling the switchboard where he would be.

He ordered a Sazerac cocktail in honor of New Orleans, where this concoction was born in the 1850s, and took a long pause for thought. He had completed his assignment, done his job, and his next logical move would be to book a flight back to Miami Beach. But the interview with Grigsby Tallent still disturbed him.

Tallent's shadow army was combing the French Quarter for Margaret Kinnison. He had a hunch about Tallent but no way to prove or disprove it over here off his familiar turf. Chief of Police Will Gentry might be able to give him a source of information about Tallent on the N.O.P.D., but Tallent was the local boy, Shayne the stranger. He doubted that any forthcoming information would be reliable.

He decided to stay in New Orleans until he found out what information about Dr. Max Lambert and Fred Graves Lucy Hamilton could relay to him.

"Telephone for you, Mr. Shayne," the bartender told him. "You can take it in the first booth over there."

Shayne thanked the man, paid for his drink and crossed to the telephone booth. "Who is speaking?" he asked.

"Dr. Patrick Long. What is it you want to know about Kinnison Moreland? Has anything happened to Kinnison?"

It was a young and concerned male voice.

"I'm sure she's all right," Shayne said. "I'm just trying to locate her for a Miami Beach law firm. It seems she has inherited a considerable amount of money from a late uncle on her father's side of the family."

"What law firm is this?" Dr. Long asked in a suspicious voice.

"Oppenheimer, Barton and Bryan, Dr. Long. A Raymond Oppenheimer is in charge of the succession. You can check their bona fides with the Florida Bar Association if you wish."

"For the time being I'll take your word," Dr. Long said. "By the way, what are you? A partner in the firm?"

"No, a private investigator retained by Ray Oppenheimer. I do work for that firm as well as other lawyers in the Miami area."

"What do you want to know about Kinnison?" Dr. Long said.

"Where is she staying down here for Mardi Gras?"

"She told me she always stays with some servant who used to work for her family," Dr. Long said. "I can't give you the woman's name nor her address but I believe she is black."

"Will she be in touch with you?" Mike asked.

"I doubt it very much. After Mardi Gras she'll come back to work here."

"I'm staying at the Lafayette Hotel here in New Orleans," Shayne told Dr. Long. "Should she call you, please let me know, and find out where I can find her."

"How much money is involved here?" Dr. Long asked.

"Approximately three million," Shayne told him.

It took a moment for Dr. Long to digest that figure. When he did his voice had a note of despair. "Here's where I lose the best damned nurse a surgeon ever had!"

"Maybe not." Shayne tried to console him. "From what I've heard from her aunt, nursing is Margar . . . Kinnison's life," Shayne corrected.

"I know her real name, Shayne, and why she changed it," Dr. Long said. "Thank you for calling. Should Kinnison phone, I'll give her your message."

Margaret Kinnison's aunt was wrong, Shayne decided. The woman had no use for a man like him with Dr. Patrick Long in love with her. To his amusement he found himself glad and sad at the same time, and just faintly jealous.

With time on his hands until Lucy Hamilton relayed information to him about Dr. Max Lambert's foundation and Fred Graves' institute, Mike decided to make a night of it along Bourbon Street. In the crowds Mike thought he might get lucky and spot Margaret Kinnison.

He began with drinks in the Sky Lite Lounge atop the Monteleone with its panoramic view of New Orleans bisected by the huge S curve of the Mississippi.

When he left the Monteleone, he realized another patron of the lounge had ridden down in the elevator with him. This was not suspicious, but when this same casually dressed "tourist" followed him into the Alpine Restaurant and Bar for supper, Shayne studied the man without seeming to do so.

The sports shirt and camera on a strap around his neck served as tourist hallmarks, but the face had the flinty look of a professional and no woman or girl was on his arm.

Tallent, he decided, was playing cat and mouse. But a one-man tail?

Unless Grigsby was a rank amateur, there would be another tail, perhaps a third.

Shayne ordered a thick steak rare and a beaker of ice-cold beer. He was discovering they keep the beer colder in New Orleans than in any other city.

XI

SUPPER FINISHED, MIKE SHAYNE started his cruise of Bourbon Street and its tourist-packed bars and strip joints. The make-believe tourist tailing him, he discovered, had been replaced by an "artist" affecting dark glasses, shaggy hair and skin-tight faded Levi's. So Tallent didn't have an inkling where to look for Margaret Kinnison. He was counting on Shayne to lead his operatives to her.

The redhead watched the amount of bourbon and water he was consuming, spacing his drinks without seeming to do so. After two stops, he assumed the counterfeit artist would turn over the tailing chore to a third party:

He had just stepped into the Maison Fontainebleau. His tail hadn't followed him out of the last place he had visited, so Shayne knew Number Three was coming onto his trail. Patrons were clustered around the bar and stripper runway while Fire Fervor did her bit, whatever her real name might be, and a four-piece band was beating out a savage rhythm. Shayne found an empty table from which he could watch the door.

He was sure he would be able to recognize the third tail. A covert glance around to make sure he was there before settling in would be the giveaway. Shayne had decided now was the time to duck all three of them so he could enjoy the rest of the evening with peace of mind.

He had already planned to start for the men's room, then duck through the kitchen (he had taken a table from which he could see the kitchen door that the waiters weren't using) and out into the back alley. Then, instead of working east along Bourbon, he'd hit the bars to the west. The double-back should have them confused enough to stake out the Lafayette and wait for his return.

He almost missed the third tail because she was a woman. She was dark-haired, pushing thirty, wearing a serape over her slacks and blouse, with a shoulder bag swinging at her side. Just inside the door from Bourbon Street she stepped aside, as if letting her eyes become accustomed to the darkness, but they searched him out.

"I'll be *damned!*" he muttered. "Tallent, you sure as hell are going all out, playing this little game of hide-and-seek!"

Shayne knew the scenario. This one would join him, casually of course. The tourist and the artist could then go home and to bed.

The woman was still standing beside the door even though Shayne knew she had spotted him. He waited for her next move. Finally she made it, ignoring Fire Fervor's frantic bumps and grinds, to cross toward a nearby table.

He flashed a grin to catch her eye and rose from his chair as if she were expected to join him. The woman hesitated, then took the bait. She faced him across his table and raised a questioning eyebrow.

Shayne rose to hold a chair for her. Without a word, she let him seat her. He resumed his place at the table. A waiter was headed their way.

"What will it be?" Shayne asked.

"A Ramos gin fizz." The woman spoke in a husky contralto. "Who are you?"

"You can call me Mike. What do we call you?" he asked.

"Maya. As in the Yucatan ruins."

"You're into archeology?" Shayne asked.

"Two Ramos fizzes," he told the waiter, then said to Maya, "Thanks for joining me."

Maya shrugged her thin shoulders. "Mardi Gras is no time to drink alone."

When the waiter brought their drinks, Shayne lifted his glass, said, "Let's drink to that, Maya."

"Let's." She clinked her glass with his.

Margaret Kinnison picked that moment to step into the Fontainebleu from Bourbon Street. A pale blue ceiling spotlight, placed so patrons wouldn't stumble when they entered, bathed the slacks-and-serape-clad young woman with enough light so that he couldn't be mistaken.

XII

MAYA'S LARGE EYES READ the surprise on Mike's face and she glanced back over her shoulder. "Someone you know?" she asked.

"No. What gave you that idea?" He continued to watch Margaret Kinnison but from the corner of his eye. "Drink up."

Maya craned her neck to study Margaret again.

The savage beating of the drum made Margaret raise her hands, as if to cover her ears, then she thought better of it. Through narrowed eyes she considered the writhing, naked stripper. Her mouth quirked in amusement, then she was gone back into the press of Mardi Gras revelers along Bourbon Street.

"You did recognize that woman, didn't you?" Maya accused.

"Sorry, but I haven't had that pleasure," Mike sparred.

A rush to Bourbon Street on the off chance he might be able to overtake Margaret Kinnison in the crowd, Shayne decided, was the wrong move at this juncture. Like himself, she was cruising the night spots. It was time to shake his third tail, Maya, and try to catch up with Margaret Kinnison.

Maya wasn't convinced, so he tried again.

"She resembled one of my sisters," he lied. Rising, he added, "Excuse me for a minute?"

Under the serape, Maya shrugged indifferently.

Mike headed for the men's room. A glance over his shoulder told him that Maya was watching him intently, and he guessed she was waiting for him to make a break. Retreat through the kitchen was out of the question. Maya would spot him when he left the men's room and stepped across to that kitchen door. But in the men's-room there was a high window that Mike estimated was just wide enough to let his broad-shouldered frame slide through.

Balancing on the wash basins, Mike unlocked the frosted glass window and pushed it open. He was poised to make a lunge up and out through the window when another patron of the Fontainebleu stepped into the men's room.

"Whassa matter, fella?" The bespectacled little man with strands of hair brushed across his bald spot regarded Shayne with his hands on his hips. "You wan' fresh air?"

Mike looked down at the middle-aged drunk and winked. "That's the general idea, friend," he said. "Give me a boost?"

"Anything for a friend," the man said in a drink-slurred voice. He made a stirrup with his hands. "Up and away!"

"Thanks, buddy."

It was a tight fit, but Mike somehow wriggled through the window and dropped on his hands and knees in a dark alley. Before he could rise to his feet a blackjack grazed his head. The force of the blow crossed his eyes and made his ears ring, but the husky attacker's aim was off.

Mike had presence of mind enough to sprawl out on his face, as if he'd been stunned.

"Good work, George!"

"Guess I cracked this one's skull, Jim," the blackjack swinger said quietly. "Hurry up and roll him."

Mike waited until Jim bent over him then rolled across the alley and came up with his back to a brick wall. His assailants should have taken to their heels, but they didn't. Instead both husky men came at him,

George swinging his blackjack, Jim with a switchblade.

Mike caught George's wrist, at the same time aiming a back-kick at Jim's knife hand. He heard the knife clatter on the pavement as he turned his back on George and whipped him over his right shoulder, the arm bones cracking as he smashed the man down to the pavement.

George let out a high-pitched squeal of pain.

Jim ran for the mouth of the alley. Mike left his feet and brought him down with a tackle. Back on his feet Mike cold-cocked the man with his fist when he started to rise.

The scene was suddenly illuminated by the headlights of a police cruiser, and two officers spilled out of their car, tugging pistols from their holsters.

"Hold it there!" The driver, feet apart, crouched, leveling his revolver with both hands to cover Mike.

His partner, gingerly sliding his revolver back into its holster, approached Mike. "Hands on top of your head!" he snapped.

Mike obeyed.

"Take the position against the wall."

Mike spread his feet and placed his palms against the brick wall. "I'm carrying a piece," he said in a calm voice. "You'll find the permit in my wallet."

A screeching siren whimpering into silence told Mike the back-up car had arrived at the mouth of the alley.

George had managed to stand up, drawing deep, ragged breaths, and slumped against the wall next to Mike. Jim was beginning to moan.

The officer frisked Mike, took the Colt .45 from his shoulder holster, sniffed the barrel.

"Okay, big boy," he said. "Very carefully get out your wallet and show me the permit to carry this piece."

Other officers were bundling George and Jim into the first police patrol car that had arrived at the scene.

The officer confronting Mike examined his permit to carry a concealed weapon issued by Chief of Police Will Gentry, then said, "Put it away, Mr. Shayne." His voice was deferential now. "We've heard about you here in New Orleans. Why didn't you let us know you came here for Mardi Gras?"

The car into which they'd locked George and Jim backed out of the alley and took off with the siren bellowing. The officer who'd questioned Mike before it left turned Mike over to the back-up men.

"This here's Mike Shayne from Miami Beach," he told them. "Try to mess with him and he'll break your arms and legs," he kidded his fellow officers. "Me and my partner appreciate the collars," he'd told Mike.

"It's going to look real good on our daily report."

"Any time," Mike said with a grin, rubbing the side of his head.

Mike told the awed back-up team of officers what had happened but omitted telling them the muggers had caught him crawling through the men's room window.

"What were you doing in this alley?" the gray-haired officer asked Mike when he'd finished his story.

"Taking a shortcut," Mike replied.

The officer shook his head. "You must like to live dangerously, Mr. Shayne."

"Sometimes I'm stupid," Mike said.

Quite a crowd was gathering at the Bourbon Street end of the alley. With an inward groan Mike realized Maya was probably part of that interested group.

Mike decided to pack it in for the day so far as working any more Bourbon Street bars was concerned. His throbbing head convinced him it was time to retreat. Maya, he realized, would be sharp enough to know why he'd tried to duck out on her. She would know that he'd spotted Margaret Kinnison and probably enlist the tourist and artist to help her find Margaret in the crowds. That wasn't good. Yet there was nothing he could do about it right now.

Telling the officers good night, Shayne headed for the Lafayette. He hadn't seen Maya in the crowd at the mouth of the alley, but he hadn't gone a block before she fell in step with him and took his arm.

"I'm not very flattered, Shayne," she said. "Your drunken friend took pity on deserted me and told me all about your escape from my toils."

Mike stopped to face the woman. "Okay. Nothing personal, you understand. You work for Tallent, don't you?"

She met his eyes. "Sometimes. I have a youngster, and my husband took French leave last year. I'm also with the N.O.P.D. Sergeant Maya Noyes, at your service." She extended a small warm hand.

Mike took it in his. "Nice to meet you."

"That was Margaret Kinnison, wasn't it?" Maya Noyes asked.

"It was," Mike admitted. "Did you alert the tourist and the artist?"

Maya nodded. "I gave them the best verbal description I could manage."

"Come along to my hotel," Mike said. "I'm expecting a call from my secretary in Miami Beach, and then I want to talk with you about Grigsby Tallent."

"Is something wrong?" Maya asked.

"It's just a hunch, but I think something may be rotten in Denmark."

XIII

IN SILENCE MAYA ACCOMPANIED Mike to the Lafayette Hotel. When he asked for his key at the desk, the clerk told him, "You've had a call from your secretary in Miami Beach, Mr. Shayne."

"Did she leave a number?" he asked.

"Yes sir, she did." The clerk handed him a slip with Lucy's number at the apartment. "Shall I ask the operator to place your call?"

"If you will, thanks," Mike said. "I'll take it in my room."

Maya hesitated about accompanying Mike into the elevator and up to his room. He flashed her a good-natured grin. "You're supposed to stick with me, aren't you?" he asked.

"Let's say I seem to be stuck with you," she said with a rueful smile. "Can we keep this completely business?"

Mike laughed as he punched the button for the elevator. "Strictly business for the time being," he said, and waved her into the elevator when it arrived.

When he reached his room the phone was ringing. Sitting on the bed, he scooped it off the cradle.

"Hello, Angel, what gives?" he asked.

"Are you alone?" Lucy asked.

"No. A sergeant from the N.O.P.D. is here with me," Mike said. "I take it you have some information for me about Dr. Max Lambert and this Fred Graves."

"Yes, Michael, I have," Lucy said. "Tim Rourke and Will Gentry helped me dig for it, so you owe them both a drink or two when you get back. Tim's sore you didn't invite him to go along with you, by the way. He said he could have conned his editor into letting him do a local color piece on Mardi Gras."

"I'll just bet Tim could have," Mike said about the reporter for the *Miami News*. "What do you have for me, Lucy?"

"Just a second. My notes are somewhere. Hold the phone a minute, Michael."

"Take your time," Mike said.

He waited until Lucy picked up the instrument again. "Let's take this Dr. Lambert first," she said. "He has a yellow sheet in Washington on a morals offense. Contributing to the delinquency of a minor. The minor was a thirteen-year-old boy. He closed up shop and came down here, but for part of his probation he's seeing a psychiatrist, Dr. Elmer Loeb. Do we know the doctor?" Lucy asked.

"I don't believe I've ever heard of him," Mike said. "Do you have anything else on Dr. Lambert?"

"Yes, He was recently married to one of his associates at the found-

ation, a Millicent Jones. He's highly regarded in academic circles for papers on both solar energy and thermal energy. Right now he's working on an economical way to store solar energy during the hot summer months for use during winter months."

"Interesting, Lucy. Now what do we have about Fred Graves and the Institute for Marine Research?"

"He used to head up Treasure Seekers, Incorporated, with headquarters in Key West," Lucy Hamilton told Mike. "Lloyd Kinnison was his chief backer. He got in trouble with the British authorities when his crew dove on a wreck near Nassau and didn't give the Crown a fair share of what they brought up. There was legal action, but the matter was settled out of court."

"Was Lloyd Kinnison involved in the court action?" Mike asked.

"I don't know," Lucy confessed. "Graves' treasure-hunt operation went broke a couple of years ago when one of his tugs was seized for smuggling marijuana and cocaine. Graves himself avoided arrest, but his partner, Gary Norton, didn't. After that Lloyd Kinnison set him up as head of the Institute for Marine Research."

"What became of Norton?" Mike asked.

"He jumped bail. Nobody seems to know where he went. That's about it, Michael."

"Thanks. You've given me something to think about," Mike said.

"Take care."

"When are you coming home?" Lucy asked.

"As soon as I can find Margaret Kinnison and put her in touch with Ray Oppenheimer. I've seen her, but we haven't gotten together."

"Do you want me to tell Mr. Oppenheimer that?" Lucy asked.

"We'd better wait until I talk with her," Mike said.

"What was that all about?" Maya asked when Mike had hung up.

"Answer me a question first," Mike said. "How much do you know about Grigsby Tallent?"

"I've met him once," Maya told him. "I didn't much care for the man, but he pays top dollar to moonlighting cops."

"Do you know the two men you were working with tailing me tonight?" was Shayne's next question.

"The one you call the tourist is Ted Adams, or that's the name he uses. The other is Bill Gaites. Tonight was the first time I worked with them. Both are pretty hard cases, I'd guess."

"Licensed?"

"No. Few of the operatives Tallent uses are. Shayne, level with me. What's on your mind?"

Mike told Maya that Lambert and Graves had retained Grigsby

Tallent to find Margaret Kinnison, although finding her could cost their foundations a million and a half. He explained his connection with Oppenheimer.

Mike instinctively trusted Maya Noyes.

"I can't get it out of my mind," he said, "that tracing Margaret Kinnison down by Tallent operatives might be dangerous for her. After all, many women are mugged and attacked; especially during Mardi Gras. So far as that's concerned, look what happened to me."

"Do you think Tallent put those men on you?" Maya asked.

"I don't think so," Mike said. "No, they figured me for a lush and were after my money: I just happened to drop into the wrong dark alley. But in the crowds and excitement it would be easy to murder Margaret Kinnison and pass it off as another statistic in the crime rate."

Mike was restless and on his feet. "Let's go look for her."

"You're really worried, aren't you?" Maya said.

Mike combed fingers through his shaggy red hair. "I have this gut feeling that won't go away that the woman is in danger."

Maya sighed. "Where do we start?"

"You know the Quarter better than I do."

"All right." Maya narrowed her eyes. "She didn't seem to like the strip joints. If she walked out on the Fontainebleu show we might eliminate all the other bars that feature strippers. That cuts it down a little."

"She was looking for a place to have a quiet drink alone, I'd guess," Mike said. "I've talked with the doctor in charge of the New Mexico clinic where she works. I get the feeling he and she are in love."

"How nice." Maya poked a finger at her cheek. "A few blocks from the Fontainebleu, over on Royal Street, there's the Story Cafe. There's no floor show, but jazz and blues musicians congregate there. She might know the place from being here before, or someone could guide her to it. Unescorted females are the rule rather than the exception." Maya anticipated Mike's question before he asked it. "Last Mardi Gras the Fontainebleu was a different sort of place, more like the Story Cafe is now."

"Let's go look there first," Mike said.

"One thing I haven't mentioned," Maya said. "I've worked narcotics. Both Adams and Gaites were higher than the moon on something tonight. Hash would be my guess."

Mike's shudder was involuntary. Hashish was the assassin's drug. The Old Man of the Mountain in Asia Minor during Crusader days sent his minions out to kill steeped in hashish.

"One more call," Mike said when Maya got up to leave. He asked

the switchboard operator for the Monteleone and Mrs. Sweeney's room.

"Hello?" She was back into the helpless little old lady role. "Who is this?" she faltered.

"Mike Shayne here, Mrs. Sweeney. I came to talk with you about your niece, Margaret Kinnison. Do you remember?" Mike asked.

"Oh, yes. You're Mr. Change."

Mike winced, but resisted playing her senile little game. "That's right. By any chance has she gotten back in touch with you?"

"Margaret hasn't."

Mike thanked the elderly lady and hung up. "Let's go," he said to Maya Noyes.

XIV

MARGARET KINNISON WAS AT a corner table in the Story Cafe sipping a sloe gin fizz while the musicians on the bandstand took a break. The euphoric Mardi Gras mood had just begun to take over, and for the first time she was really glad that she'd made the trip this year.

It was good to be in off the street and out of the festive hurrying crowds of revelers.

She noticed the tourist with a camera on a strap around his neck eyeing her from the bar, as the artist-type next to him was doing too. Margaret smiled inwardly, wondering what pretence they would hit upon to try to pick her up. She wasn't afraid. The Story Cafe was too crowded for either man to become too insistent or offensive.

The musicians were coming back, the piano player rippling the keys while waiting for the others to pick up their instruments.

Here they came. The musicians swung into *When the Saints Go Marching In*.

"Miss Kinnison?"

It startled her that the older man knew her name. "Yes, what is it?"

The younger man took her arm and pulled so she had to stand up before she could jerk out of his grasp. "What is this?" she asked indignantly, not yet afraid. "What do you want with me?"

"Undercover police officers." It was the older man, the tourist, who spoke, and he flashed some sort of badge. "Narcotics division. Would you please step outside with us a moment?"

What was it about their eyes that frightened her?

"There's been some mistake," she said, but they were on either side of her now, walking her toward the door.

Margaret tried to stop. Without seeming to do so they kept her moving.

"We'll see if there's a mistake outside," the younger man said in a soothing voice. "Sometimes they do happen."

"We appreciate your cooperation," the older man said.

Once they were outside the Story Cafe on Royal Street, they marched her toward a blue sedan parked at the curb.

It finally registered with Margaret. These men, both of them, were high on drugs!

"You're not police!" Margaret Kinnison gasped, and tried to wrench away from them.

No two witnesses after the fact there on Royal Street in front of the Story Cafe would tell the police team of investigators the same story.

Mike and Maya, approaching the cafe, saw Margaret Kinnison between the two men at the same time.

"There they are," Maya said.

"I see them," Mike told her. At the time, although later Mike had to admit to himself it was strange, he felt no pulse of alarm.

Not so Maya. "They're kidnapping her!" she said loudly.

Margaret picked that moment to make a break for freedom. At the same time both Adams and Gaites recognized Shayne and Maya.

Adams twisted Margaret's arm behind her back, and she felt the cold muzzle of a revolver press the nape of her neck. "Back off, Shayne," he said with a cold smile.

Hands half-lifted, palms up, Mike tried to edge in front of Maya. "You can't get away with this, Adams," he said, and hoped the men weren't too high on hashish.

Margaret was frozen, eyes pleading with Mike to do something.

Maya dodged around him.

"That's enough, you two!" Foolhardy because she'd been teamed with them earlier that evening, before she met Mike Shayne, Maya took a purposeful step toward them, almost as an afterthought delving into her shoulder bag for her snub-nosed duty revolver. "Let her go, damn it!"

Later Mike would correct the most common eyewitness version of the shooting. Because they saw the gun pressed to Margaret's neck in the hand of Adams, they swore he shot Maya.

Actually, Bill Gaites shot her down at nearly point blank range through the fabric of his denim jacket.

Gaites scorched his jacket with three quick shots from a .32 Beretta, all of them striking Maya just below the breastbone and shattering her heart.

As she went down, first to her knees, then sprawled on her face on the

sidewalk, Mike's .45 was in his hand. Adams, in a panic, let Margaret go as he saw Mike's weapon. Before he could aim, and while Gaites was trying to untangle the Beretta from the ruined pocket of his jacket, Mike put a .45 slug into Adams' forehead right between the eyes.

Pivoting from the hips, Mike slammed two slugs into Gaites' chest, saw him dance backward from the impact of the bullets, then pitch forward.

Mike was on his knees, lifting Maya, turning her over.

"God damn it!" he swore when he stared down into her lifeless eyes. Mike glanced up and met the eyes of a goggle-eyed man a dozen feet away, the only close spectator to the gunplay, too frozen with shock and fear to run. "Call the police," Mike snapped. "Now!"

The man scuttled for the entrance to the Story Cafe.

Margaret Kinnison was staring down at him, her face pale with shock and her mouth working as she tried to find words.

Mike slipped out of his sports coat and folded it as a cushion under Maya's head, then drew down her eyelids with his fingers and covered her face with a corner of the serape.

"Who is . . . was she?" Margaret finally managed to stammer.

"A police officer," Mike said. "She was helping me search for you."

"Why?"

They heard the distant wail of sirens drawing closer. Mike stood up, feeling a hundred years old. He took Margaret's elbow and turned her back to the limp body staining the sidewalk with blood.

"It's a matter of three million dollars," Mike said.

"What?" Margaret Kinnison's brow wrinkled. "You must be out of your mind!"

A screaming siren was in the same block with them. Mike spoke over the nerve-jerking sound. "I'll explain later."

"I want to know now!" Margaret Kinnison was verging on hysteria. "Just who the devil are you?"

"Mike Shayne from Miami Beach. I'm a private investigator, Miss Kinnison. Your uncle, Lloyd Kinnison, has left you a great deal of money."

The first officers had arrived on the murder scene, stunned to find three bodies with Mike and Margaret standing over them. Mike offered his .45, butt first, to the first policeman who had arrived. He pointed to the entrance of the Story Cafe.

"One of them killed Maya Noyes, and I killed the two men in self-defense," Mike told the officers in a matter-of-fact voice. "They were

kidnapping this young woman. You'll find us inside. We both need a drink."

Mike had an afterthought and turned before he and Margaret reached the entrance. "Pick up Grigsby Tallent for conspiracy to kidnap Miss Kinnison and also to commit murder," he told the gathering officers. "I'll explain later."

When he got back to Miami Beach and his own turf, Mike decided, he'd get to the bottom of the plot to hit Margaret Kinnison, and would nail either Bill Graves or Dr. Lambert for the crime if he had to deal with the perpetrator in his own way.

"The devil can have his soul," Mike muttered, "but his skin belongs to me!"

There would be a fat fee from Oppenheimer. For Maya there would be a police pension to care for her orphaned daughter, but it would never be enough to compensate the child for the loss of her gallant mother.

Neither would the largest part of his fee from Oppenheimer, Mike knew — but it might help.

Oblivious to the tragedy in the street outside, the band was backing their trumpet player, who was soloing *When the Saints Go Marching In*.

Coming Next Month

THE PHOENIX GAMBIT

by Brett Halliday

The new suspense-filled short novel
chronicling the latest spine-tingling
adventure of your favorite red-headed
Miami detective.

Don't Miss It!

CIRCLE OF DEATH

Two Players Died at Bingo Games. Was It the
Excitement or Was It Murder?

by DAVID KNOX

JOE GALLAGHER WONDERED how his city editor's itching nose could smell murder in a heart attack. A Pasadena dowager named Pamela Smythe had collapsed and died that afternoon while playing bingo for charity in a church basement. Hiram Jackson's nose itched because of a similar death a week before under the same circumstances in the same church basement. Couldn't two old broads have heart attacks without there being some sinister connection?

Joe knew he was thinking a cop-out question. It was his job to stop Jackson's damn nose from itching by proving there was a sinister connection between the two deaths. That's what investigative reporters did on the Los Angeles *Tribune* unless they wanted to go back to writing obituaries, which this assignment might well turn out to be nothing more than.

Joe shuddered at the thought as he inched his '59 Chevy station wagon in tandem with peak Pasadena Freeway bumper-to-bumper

traffic. It was like crawling in a race against time. Newspaper deadlines were oblivious to obstructive automobile bumpers. The Smythe death had to be investigated and reported to rewrite by 4 o'clock to make the afternoon edition. And the old dame had been dead less than an hour, Joe surmised, glancing at his watch. It was now plus or minus 2:30.

At California Street, where the freeway began filtering to surface streets, Joe exited left to Fair Oaks, then right to Congress, where he parked the station wagon and walked a remaining block to the receiving entrance of the Pasadena Emergency Hospital.

A jutting sign read "Sheriff." He knocked on the door.

"Come in," a familiar voice invited.

He entered, exclaiming: "There is a Bob Simmons. How opportune."

The uniformed deputy rose and walked around a shiny mahogany desk, extending a hand which Joe grasped eagerly.

"Why opportune?" Simmons smiled. "Another deputy might serve you better. I have no bottle and no money for a drink."

Joe feigned disappointment to go along with the gag, then decided there was no time for levity.

"A drink wouldn't help," he said somberly. "I need a friend."

Simmons withdrew his hand from Joe's grasp and wiped it on his jacket.

"Your nerves are dripping," he frowned. "A wet palm needs tending. How can I help?"

Joe explained about his city editor's itching nose.

"Jackson's nose doesn't really itch," he said. "It's his way of demonstrating a hunch. But he scratches until the hunch is resolved."

"Weird," Simmons observed wryly.

Returning to his desk, he motioned Joe to sit across from him in a comfortable-looking lounge chair. Joe sank into it with a sigh.

"Your city editor will rake his nose raw if he expects to publish Pamela Smythe's death as a murder," he continued. "The doctor was consulted. He said the old lady had coronary artery disease and had lived under constant threat of what he called potential coronary occlusion."

Joe leaned forward in the chair, apprehensive that Simmons, whose job it is to question questionable deaths, had found nothing to question.

"Were you on duty last week," he asked, "when a Mrs. Wicks died of the same disease, under the same circumstances?"

Simmons stiffened, obviously aware of implied negligence of duty.

"I was not," he answered evenly. "Had I been, I still would have accepted the doctor's diagnosis."

He swiveled in his chair, looking through a window to where an ambulance was arriving with another emergency victim.

"Here comes another one," he gritted. "If no private doctor attests to the cause, or if it appears that a crime has been committed, I will investigate."

Simmons stroked the stubble of afternoon whiskers.

"Your trouble, my friend, is not an itching nose. It is a yen to live in past glory. Once you stumbled over a dead body in the brush where you expected to find quail. You heard a car start. You ran to the road and wrote down a license number. Reporter for dad's weekly newspaper solved murder. AP story. By-line. Instant fame. The big city."

Simmons paused and Joe rose from comfort to tension, straining over the desk.

"I know that Mrs. Smythe and Mrs. Wicks were not raped and strangled. Their hearts stopped beating. So did the heart of the girl I found in the bushes."

"What kind of comparison is that?" Simmons scoffed, waving his arms. "Mrs. Smythe had a heart disease. She died of coronary occlusion."

Joe whirled from the desk and strode to the door, flabbergasted that a deputy sheriff could be so dense.

"It's possible," he said over his shoulder, "that coronary occlusion was the *effect*, not the *cause*. I intend to find out."

"PARDON ME," Joe said as he approached the nurses' station where a baby-faced white-clad intern was thumbing through a clipboard chart. "I'm Joe Gallagher, L.A. *Tribune*. May I see the doctor who attended Pamela Smythe?"

The intern closed the chart file and handed it to a nurse behind the counter.

"Mrs. Smythe was dead on arrival," he said, gesturing toward the chart. "I was on duty."

"You pronounced her dead?" Joe asked.

"Yes."

"Did you determine the cause of death?"

"Not exactly. Her doctor called. He said Mrs. Smythe had underlying coronary artery disease and that he would sign the death certificate."

"This artery disease," Joe pursued, "it could cause coronary occlusion?"

"Coronary occlusion is the logical result . . ."

"The result?" Joe interrupted.

"Yes. Mrs. Smythe vomited, indicating nausea. Coronary occlusion followed."

"Then coronary occlusion *resulted* from nausea," Joe said, grasping for a glimmer of possibility. "Not the other way around?"

"It . . . it . . . must have," the intern replied nervously. "The victim vomited. Yes. It must have been that way."

"In your opinion, doctor," Joe persisted, "could the stress of a bingo game cause nausea?"

"I . . . I . . . don't think so," the intern stammered. "It . . . it . . . might have been something she ate, or . . ."

"Or shock!" Joe exclaimed. "Thank you. You've been most helpful."

THE WORD FOR MR. GRAHAM of the Graham Mortuary, Joe decided immediately, was "sanctimonious," befitting his trade. The short, grayish-haired mortician gushed, saccharine-sweet.

"Pleased to serve, anytime," Graham said, bowing, when Joe entered the office and expressed gratitude for the audience. "Pamela Smythe. Poor soul. Only 64. Handsome lady . . . and brave. She was majestic at her husband's funeral."

"Big funeral?" Joe asked. "Expensive casket? The works?"

Graham's occupational palor flushed. He scurried to his desk,

leaving Joe standing in the center of the small room.

"How callous of you, Mr. Gallagher," he fumed. "Mr. Smythe's service reflected his good taste . . . his lofty status . . . his . . ."

"And Mrs. Smythe?" Joe interrupted. "The same treatment, I presume."

"Alas, no," Graham said mournfully, looking as though he had gas pains. "I'm simply shattered. Mrs. Smythe will be cremated tomorrow morning at Bellevue Crematory . . . in a cloth-covered pine box."

"Was Mr. Smythe cremated?" Joe asked.

"Heavens, no! Mrs. Smythe bought two lovely mausoleum crypts. One for herself."

"Cremated remains in a mausoleum crypt," Joe mused. "Unusual, wouldn't you say?"

Graham frowned and shook his head in obvious despair.

"Mrs. Smythe's remains will be scattered at sea," he said sorrowfully. "It's a crying shame."

"Why the rush?" Joe asked. "And why the pauper treatment?"

"Mrs. Stewart — that's Mrs. Smythe's housekeeper — said Mrs. Smythe belonged to a funeral society called Serve the Living," the mortician lamented. "These people are a blight on the dignity of death. They say funerals are barbaric. Members agree to leave

the bulk of their estates to charity, foregoing appropriate caskets and final rites."

Joe's stomach quivered in silent laughter.

"So the Bellevue Crematory receives its normal burning and dumping charge," he chuckled. "All you get is a charity case."

"Almost," Graham admitted. "We sell our minimum service."

"You mean the one advertised on bus stop benches at the 'as low as' price? The one you tell bereaved families they wouldn't want to buy for a dog?"

Graham sprang to his feet, clasping his face in his hands. Joe suspected that the reaction expressed more guilt than shame.

"You are insulting," the mortician raged. "Make notes if you wish from Mrs. Smythe's vital statistics record on the desk. Then please leave."

Joe took a notepad from his pocket and with the stub of a pencil recorded pertinent facts about the late Pamela Smythe. Normally he would have asked permission to use the mortuary phone to dictate his story to the *Tribune* re-write desk. But under the circumstances a phone booth seemed more appropriate. At the office doorway he turned and spoke to a face as ashen as that of the deceased Mrs. Smythe.

"Thank you, Mr. Graham," he said. "I didn't mean to infer that your minimum service isn't fit for

a dog. I'm sure it is."

JOE LEFT the phone booth and headed his 100,000-mile vintage station wagon toward the cluttered apartment he called home.

First he had called Bob Simmons to ask his alleged, or erstwhile friend, to request an autopsy on the body of Pamela Smythe on grounds that the cause of coronary occlusion had not been established. It was possible, but there was room for doubt, that Mrs. Smythe had become nauseous from any number of natural causes, precipitating her death. It also was possible that the impetus for nausea could have been inflicted in a crowded room by an elbow or fist . . . a blow to the stomach or head.

Reluctantly, Simmons had agreed to call the Coroner and suggest, but not request, an autopsy.

With that meager assurance of respite, Joe had called the *Tribune* and asked for re-write.

"Re-write, White," a bored voice had answered.

"Gallagher here," Joe announced. "Will you write a story for me? I'm too pooped to dictate it properly."

"If I must," White responded unenthusiastically, "Shoot."

Joe related the basic facts. Mrs. Pamela Smythe, 64, wealthy widow, 1996 San Pásqual, Pasadena. Dead on arrival Pasadena Emergency Hospital following

collapse about 1:15 p.m. while playing bingo at the weekly session of the Pasadena Charity League at St. Andrew's Community Church. Death certificate cites coronary occlusion as the cause of death. No living relatives. Husband Horace, stockbroker, died 10 years ago of cancer. Arrangements with Graham Mortuary made via telephone by Mrs. Esther Stewart, housekeeper and companion. No funeral. Cremation tentatively scheduled for tomorrow morning at Bellevue Crematory.

"Why tentatively?" White had asked.

"There may be an autopsy," Joe answered hesitantly. "But that's not for publication."

"Okay," White said. "Anything else?"

"Yes," Joe replied. "There's probably a picture of Mrs. Smythe in the morgue, also background on her activities as a humanitarian and patron of the arts. It also might be a good idea to read a story that appeared in the society section recently about the Pasadena Charity League. You know the angle. The old lady died as she had lived, helping the less fortunate. Also, we ran a story last week about a Mrs. Wicks who died after collapsing while playing bingo at the same place. I think Jackson would like the lead to be: 'for the second time in a week, etc.' His nose itches and mine is mired in grindstone dust. Tell him

there's little hope for either of us."

Now, as Joe approached Woodman Avenue, with a bottle of bourbon three blocks away, he relaxed in anticipation. After a couple of belts, he could heat up a TV dinner and forget about Pamela Smythe until morning. Then, if the Coroner agreed to conduct an autopsy, he would be off the hook. Natural death or suspected foul play. Hiram Jackson's nose would stop itching, whichever.

As though steered by automatic pilot, the station wagon reached the doorless stall where it dripped oil at night. Joe slid from the wagon and walked past a forest of posts that kept the apartments above from crumbling. He entered a flagstone entry way, bounded by shrubs, that led to a sliding glass door and a stairway to emptiness. An elevator went there, too, but he could crawl faster than it operated. He climbed the stairs to the third floor. When he arrived at his apartment, the door was open.

He had dated a few girls since his arrival in Los Angeles. A couple of them had wanted to live with him. But he had instructed his landlady to let no one in his apartment. No one else had a key. Yet he saw at a glance that a female had been, or was, here. The fold-out couch was a couch, not an unmade bed. Magazines were neatly stacked in the storage

area of one end table. Paperback books had been transformed from a pile to a row in the other. His portable typewriter was encased in its cover on the small oak desk beside the bathroom entrance where he headed to see if dirty socks, shorts and shirts he had strewn around the wing chair between one end table and the desk were now in the wicker hamper where they belonged. The smell of Lysol and the gleam of clean tile told him they were before he looked. So were soiled towels that had been replaced with fresh ones on shiny stainless steel racks.

He returned to the living room as a small figure in form-fitting leather, black braids bouncing against her back, darted along a worn path in the carpet from kitchen to front door. She opened the door, which Joe had closed, and faced him with a radiant smile that formed a golden setting for sapphire eyes.

"I promised the landlady," she said demurely, nodding toward the open door. "She thinks I'm your fiancée, here to straighten up the apartment."

"Who are you?" Joe asked, sidling toward the kitchen where sanity was stored — in an Early Times bottle. "And why *are* you here?"

The girl's moccasined feet skipped apart with the grace of a ballet dancer. She stood hands on hips, her blue eyes dancing. It occurred to Joe that the com-

bination of dark hair and light eyes was as rare as Elizabeth Taylor.

"My name is Judy," she said mischievously. "My horoscope brought me. You're rawboned. Right? You're a writer. Right? You're tall and dark. Right? About 30. Right? Well, my horoscope said I would meet you today. And I did. That's it."

Joe stood in the kitchen entrance entranced. The unmistakable aroma of Mulligan stew permeated the air. This unbelievable leprechaun could even cook.

"I'm skinny," he admitted, "if that's rawboned. I'm tall, I guess. And dark. You didn't mention handsome."

Judy wafted toward him like a breeze.

"Rawboned is generic, like Abraham Lincoln," she explained. "Skinny is undernourished."

"Handsome?" she added, finger-tipping his chin. "A beard might help."

Joe felt intoxication that a bottle could never provide.

"Shall we eat first?" he asked huskily, cradling her face in his hands.

"As you wish," she whispered.

JOE AWAKENED to the exhilarating smell of bacon frying. He breathed deeply, savoring the aroma and briefly was at home again. His mother, in a long flowered robe, zipped up the front,

and spider web netting holding her auburn hair in place through ardor and slumber, would be preparing breakfast. Dad would be shaving, carefully edging his trim mustache borrowed from Ronald Colman. With the bacon there would be scrambled chive-laden eggs, some crisp buttered toast, browned new potatoes and steaming coffee percolating with egg shell and a dash of salt. He and dad would eat, then leave to work on next week's edition of the Sonoma County *Sentinel*.

Joe was thinking 'it's good to be home' when Judy called from the kitchen: "as they say in Sonoma County, 'come and get it'."

So he had told her about his home and the newspaper he would publish someday. After several bourbons and her delicious stew, he might have told her anything, except the one incongruous thing he had wanted to say: "I love you." Incongruous because it was miraculously true — to the unbelievable extent that he had declined her body. It had seemed somehow inappropriate, if not downright sacrilegious, to violate her professed virginity. If that wasn't love, what the hell was it? One thing he knew, if only instinctively: she hadn't come to him for stud service.

"You are wondering why I'm here," Judy said from the kitchen doorway. "So get dressed and I'll tell you."

During breakfast, she told him.

First with a *Tribune* headline:

CAN BINGO KILL?

SECOND PASADENA WOMAN

DIES UNDER UNUSUAL

CIRCUMSTANCES

by Joe Gallagher

The story Jim White had written required a by-line because, although factual, it had feature overtones. Two hearts that beat for charity had stopped beating. They were frail hearts, pitting limited durability against the stress of a game that could cause healthy hearts to race. Was bingo a game of "no chance" for those destined for a certificate citing coronary occlusion as the probable cause of death? Were chips frantically placed on numbered cards too high a price to pay for a summer camp outing or a Boy Scout uniform?

Joe appreciated what Jim White had written and made a mental note to buy him a drink. The rewrite man had more than done justice to the Gallagher name, concluding with a summary of the previous *Tribune* article about the Pasadena Bingo Charity League, sponsored by four charity-oriented groups and Knowland & Associates, a Pasadena-based advertising agency. The League had been instigated by Mrs. Vivian Spence, president of Bellevue Crematory and head of one of the participating organizations, "Serve the Living," a burial society — advocating bare-cost funerals, the scattering of cre-

mated remains and trust funds allocated to deserving charities, in lieu of expensive ostentation such as metal caskets, flowers and memorials, other than simple bronze plaques on a "Wall of Acclamation" at the crematory, affirming that those recorded "served the living in death as well as in life."

Judy leaned across the small kitchen table and squeezed Joe's arm.

"My last name is Wicks," she said. "When I called the *Tribune* and found out you were working on the story, I came to help you find out who murdered my mother. I stayed the night because I wanted to. Thank you for your restraint. I must have believed my horoscope. I've never been so rash and impulsive before."

"How old are you, Judy?" Joe asked. "Which has nothing to do with my restraint. I was pretty sure I wouldn't have been contributing to the delinquency of a minor. It was something else. I'll tell you when I figure it out."

"I think I know what it was," Judy replied. "I'm willing to wait, as I've waited for 29 years, counting puberty. But if I'm unwed and untried at 30 it will be no fault of mine, now that I've met you. That's a warning."

"I warn you in return," Joe said, patting her hand. "I'm no Abraham Lincoln. I couldn't memorize the Gettysburg address, let alone write it."

Judy's laughter trilled like a bird singing, then her dancing eyes became abruptly serious.

"I'm a wealthy heiress with a home that could house at least 12 children, in case you're interested," she said humorlessly. "So there's only one thing you need ever write for me. Who killed my mother?"

II

THE CREMATORY was a bank of furnaces, each like those formerly stoked by bare-chested men to propel a ship or train. Only here the heat was constant and the furnaces were stoked with wooden caskets containing dead bodies.

As Joe entered the concrete-walled inferno, he was engulfed by the acrid smell of burning flesh, wood and cloth being reduced to ashes and bone fragments. When filtered from extraneous residue, human remains, according to authority, would weight about the same as the body had weighed at birth. Which meant that Pamela Smythe was about to regain her natal weight of around seven pounds.

The casket rested on a platform at furnace level. A brawny man hunched against it, ready to shove it into the flames. A blonde woman, dressed in black, stood beside the casket.

"In death, as in life, you serve the living, Pamela dear," the woman intoned, raising her arms

in a mock gesture of benediction.

"May I come in?" Joe shouted from the doorway.

The woman turned. Joe recognized her from her picture in the *Tribune* when the "Serve the Living" story was published. Vivian Spence who, according to gossip not exposed in the story, preyed on married men. Her name had been linked with a number of husbands whose wives had divorced them. It was said that she waged a vendetta against wives by seducing their husbands because her father had loved her mother so much that he had no time for his daughter. Joe recalled a recent remark by a *Tribune* columnist who specialized in gossip printable or not: "Vivian Spence's current conquest must be the real thing. Lester Burke is willing and his wife Jean couldn't care less. She's a lesbian."

Joe wondered, as Vivian Spence whirled to face him, if her aversion to wives included formerly happy widows such as Susan Wicks and Pamela Smythe.

"You're out of bounds, whoever you are," Vivian said coldly. "This ceremony is private."

"Name's Gallagher," Joe replied. "Los Angeles *Tribune*. I'm doing a piece on cremation. I came to see one."

Vivian motioned to the brawny one. He heaved. The casket slid into the furnace.

"You've seen one," Vivian shouted. "Now go."

She turned to the brawny one.

"Throw him out!"

Joe backed to the door and pushed it open, raising a palm.

"Please," he implored facetiously. "No bloodshed. I'm anemic."

JOE CLOSED THE DOOR behind him and hurried to the crematory office. A plump, fiftyish woman sat at the drab office's solitary desk.

"Can I help you?" she asked saccharine-sweetly.

"I want to be cremated," Joe said solemnly.

"Pre-need arrangements?" the plump one beamed. "A wise decision. It relieves your loved ones when . . ."

"You don't understand," Joe interrupted, feigning seriousness. "I want to be cremated now."

The plump one reached and drew a Kleenex from a container on the blemished oak desk and dabbed at her forehead.

"What's wrong with that?" Joe asked, shrugging his shoulders. "Just wrap me in a sheet and burn me. It won't hurt long."

"You're . . . you're crazy." The plump one hesitated with fright in her voice.

"Not so crazy, Bertha," Vivian Spence said behind Joe's back. "It could happen that way . . . if this pest doesn't get the hell out of here."

Joe turned, both palms raised.

"I'll go," he said, "but first one question. Why did Mrs. Smythe ask to be cremated, and so soon after her death?"

Vivian smiled contemptuously, or was it condescendingly? In either case, Joe knew he wouldn't like the answer.

"Mrs. Smythe decided against a barbaric funeral," Vivian smirked. "No ostentation. No bank of flowers. No expensive casket. And no self-serving memorial, as inspired by the arrogance of Pharaohs who broke the backs of millions building pyramids to perpetuate ego."

Joe turned and walked toward the door, shaking his head.

"That's a revelation," he said. "How stupid of me. I always thought the pyramids served the living. Scholars, historians, tourists . . . and like that."

FROM THE REARVIEW mirror of his wagon, Joe watched Vivian scurry to a black Mercedes and roar from the parking lot. He followed. Fortunately, she didn't drive far or she would have lost him. The old Chevy was no match for the sleek import that had bypassed Cadillac and Lincoln as a prestige symbol.

At the *Retreat*, a swank restaurant where surreptitious trysts reportedly kept the cash register bulging, Vivian swerved the Mercedes into a parking space and exited hurriedly. Joe parked across the street.

Inside the restaurant he squinted into darkness for a moment before form and substance came into focus. Through a grilled barrier separating the bar from plush dining booths, he saw Vivian approach a blond broad-shouldered man who rose to bid her be seated. Joe sat at a bar table adjacent to the grilled barrier, where he hoped to overhear their conversation.

"Sorry to be late," Vivian said, settling into the cushioned seat with a sigh. "A prying newspaper reporter detained me. Gallagher of the *Tribune*, the one who wrote the Pamela Smythe story."

"Do you think he's suspicious?" the man asked apprehensively.

"I'm afraid so," Vivian replied. "He said he was writing an article on cremation and wanted to see one. I think that's a crock of you-know-what."

"Then we may have to cremate him," the man said dourly. "Ashes tell no tales."

"Not yet, Lester," Vivian said. "It hasn't come to that. There was no autopsy this time and there will be none next time. Ashes, as you say, tell no tales."

So Vivian's association with Lester Burke was more than clandestine adultery, Joe thought grimly. It was somehow a compact for murder. He strained to hear more.

"I have Esther Thornton's signature," Vivian continued acidly. "Children's Hospital \$100,000, plus \$25,000 for 'Serve the Living' as administrator. As you know, she was to have been number three in our bingo-five plan. But she's leaving town for a month. We'll have to skip a number. Jean is next."

"My wife can wait," Burke objected. "Ron Hendricks will control the advertising agency if Jean dies before he does. If there's to be one more bingo death before we incinerate the reporter, it has to be Hendricks. I can't risk having him refuse to play bingo with Jean gone."

"I thought your marriage contract specifies that you inherit the agency when Jean dies," Vivian said.

"True," Burke replied, "but Jean has since given a 51% interest to Hendricks because our major accounts are loyal to him. He threatened to start his own agency."

Joe listened to silence, except for the tinkle of ice in cocktail glasses. In a showdown between these two calculating schemers, he was betting on Vivian.

"Okay," Vivian concurred. "On one condition. You ditch that little floozy you've been seeing in out-of-the-way places. Don't bother to deny it. I've had you followed. You're no great shakes, except in bed, but you're my very

own louse. If you drop Suzie and marry me when you can, I'll agree. Hendricks a week from Monday."

Joe left the cocktail lounge and called Judy from a public phone in the men's room.

"Two things," he said curtly, wanting to be anything but curt and afraid to be anything else. He would love to have twelve kids, but not as the husband of a rich wife. And he couldn't support a mansion on the salary he would ever make. He wondered if she would settle for fewer kids and a home in Sonoma County.

"What two things?" Judy prompted. "Did you misplace your notes?"

"No notes," Joe muttered. "I was thinking. First, I want to attend next Monday's bingo game at St. Andrew's. Second, I want you to find out for me if there are bingo players, other than your mother and Mrs. Smythe, who have underlying coronary artery disease. Check particularly on Esther Thornton, Jean Burke and Ron Hendricks. Also, I need to know where these players sit, if they are assigned reserved seats."

"You've got it," Judy said curtly, matching tone of answer with tone of request. "First you can sit in mother's seat at the bingo game. It is still reserved. Second, I'll talk with Dr. Stanton, mother's doctor. He may have other heart patients who belong to the charity league, or perhaps he

can refer me to other heart specialists who do. Anything else?"

"No, nothing else," Joe replied, again curtly, sustaining the impersonal tone of the conversation, wishing he could say "Everything else" instead.

JOE DESCENDED concrete stairs to the basement of St. Andrew's Community Church where tables and chairs were set up for the weekly session of the Pasadena Bingo Charity League. He noted that chairs and tables were arranged in five sections of five tables each, designated by numbers on easel signs. He headed for section number 1 where Sarah Wicks had been assigned seat number 1 at the first table. Judy had arranged for him to occupy it as a substitute for herself, now that the seat belonged to her.

Vivian Spence, now in a gold sheath dress, climbed steps to a platform facing the bingo tables.

"Shall we begin?" she said gayly into a rostrum microphone. The sound was faint, almost indistinguishable. Joe reached for an earphone headset on the table in front of his seat, realizing why it was there and why other players were wearing them.

"Remember the rules," Vivian said, as Joe donned the headset. "There are bingo cards on your table. Play as many as you wish. Mrs. Allen, our treasurer, will be around to collect \$5 per card before each game and deliver \$125 to

the winner of the preceding game."

She flashed a smile and brushed back a dangling golden ringlet that flounced over one eye.

"You know, of course, that even losers win in this game," she continued. "Someone in need will be helped by every card you buy. If you win, it is customary to donate your winnings to charity. Either leave them with us to distribute as the donation committee decides, or choose your own charity, including yourself."

There was a ripple of polite laughter. It was obvious to Joe that players other than guests had heard the joke many times before. He took one card, hoping the *Tribune* would reimburse him, and picked up a handful of chips that reminded him of playing tiddlywinks as a kid. Flicking one chip with another, trying to deposit more flying chips in a receptacle than opponents did had been a popular game during his preteen years.

The memory registered as an idea. He dropped his chips on the floor and slid from his chair. He was toying with the chips tiddlywink fashion when Mrs. Allen, a typical bespectacled matron with bluish hair, came to collect for the game. He smiled up at her and shook his head.

"I'll have to pass this time," he said sheepishly.

Mrs. Allen went to the outer edge of the table and walked along

it, reaching for payments from other players. Joe tilted his chair enough to see beneath it. The amplifier, which he understood remained beneath the chair when the transmission line was disconnected, looked like an aluminum pear affixed to the chair by a suction cup. The suction cup overlapped a ring where another, larger cup had adhered. It was logical, he thought, that amplifiers would have to be replaced occasionally and that they wouldn't be placed precisely where the faulty one had been. But why was the overlapped circle larger than the obvious circumference of the present suction cup. Since a previously placed suction cup had been larger, the amplifier must have been larger. More kilocycles, perhaps. More than the middle ear could withstand. The result would be shock, nausea, possible death. He made a mental note to consult a doctor again, also an electronic specialist, as he picked up the chips and waited for the next game to begin.

As Vivian Spence began whirling a revolving cage containing cards, she directed eye-darts at Joe, then looked anxiously or frantically toward the rear of the basement. Joe turned his head to follow her gaze to where Lester Burke sat nodding.

Burke left his seat and strode to a door marked "Men." Either Vivian's eye communication had caused kidney urgency, which

was doubtful, or else there was a telephone in that room.

Instinct urged Joe to leave, but he decided to wait until the first game ended. Something in the way the game was played might prove important.

Vivian stopped the whirling cage, opened a flap and reached for a card.

"The number is two," she announced listlessly, like someone who would rather be somewhere else, even Philadelphia.

She whirled the wheel again, lackadaisically it seemed to Joe, as though she was bored. Or maybe stalling. Perhaps she sensed that he would stay for one game and was trying to prolong it. Perhaps...

Again he fought the instinct to leave. Curiosity won. If Vivian and Burke were about to show their hand, he had to see it, even if the cards were stacked — against him. This was poker, not bingo. It was a game he loved to play.

"The number is one," Vivian announced with an inflection resembling a question. Joe's eyes followed hers to the men's room door, where Burke answered the implied question with a nod.

Joe flinched. He was number one ... section, table, seat. And something was to be done about it.

The game droned on. Joe fidgeted in his seat, hoping someone

would yell "Bingo!" so he could leave. No one did, number after number. It seemed that fate was setting a stage, based on time, where he would be the principal actor.

AS JOE SLID into the Chevy wagon, the cold muzzle of a gun pressed against the back of his neck.

"Take the Pasadena Freeway to the York Boulevard off-ramp," a raspy voice instructed.

Joe knew where they were going. He had been there. Bellevue Crematory. So Vivian and Burke had decided that he knew, or suspected, too much. He was to become a Judge Crater or Amelia Earhart. Disappear without a trace. *Ashes can't tell.*

"Here," the gunman rasped. Joe swung the wagon through open wrought-iron gates.

Ahead was a flood-lighted imitation of the Taj Mahal where an ancient potentate had enshrined his beloved. It was a travesty, Joe thought, as he pulled to a stop on the cracked concrete driveway that circled in front of the blatant outrage of an architectural wonder. The majesty of green marble domes adorning the original memorial seemed ostentatious, like an overdressed woman, in this mockingbird replica. Why was it, he wondered as he turned off the motor, that a mockingbird sounded shrill and

raucous when it warbled stolen bird songs in the dawning? Why did it jar the nerves, while the trill of a meadowlark heralded the new day with lyrical promise!

The gun jabbing at his back reminded him that his abhorrence of imitation had nothing to do with the price of kumquats. All the birds would soon have their heads tucked under their wings for the night. There would be no morning litany, soothing or jarring, because there would be no morning.

He felt the gun wedge against his right shoulder, directing him to leave the wagon. He did so and walked slowly up marble stairs leading to the crematory entrance at the massive double doors, cast in bronze and covered artificially with a smattering of patina, adding a green tinge of false antiquity. The gunman prodded him to enter.

"The door is open," the gunman rasped, apparently the only way he could talk. "No one's there."

Joe jerked the right door open and jumped into the crematory, closing the door behind him. He waited a split second, then thrust the door open with a lunge. He heard metal strike metal and a clattering on the marble steps. He lurched around the open door and sprang at the gunman like a football tackle, his head propelled into the stomach, his arms locked around the knees. He twisted as he fell, landing heavily on the only

padding his body provided. Pain shot through his buttocks. He released the gunman's knees and clasped the scrawny neck above him, rolling the writhing gunman to a prone position beside him on the cold marble landing. He hesitated, wondering if any bones were broken. The pain seemed only muscular. He struggled to his feet, pulling the gunman with him by the neck. He relaxed his grip. The gunman stood before him gasping for breath and wiping blood from his nose with a Levi jacket sleeve.

Joe clutched the unbuttoned Levi jacket in both hands, pulling upward until the small man was on tiptoes, gasping into his face.

"P . . . P . . . Please," he chattered, no longer rasping, "It's . . . a . . . a jest. I was told . . . not to . . . harm you."

"By whom?" Joe asked, knowing.

"I don't know."

"There's something else you don't know," Joe said, releasing his grip. "I wasn't meant to leave this place alive. Nor were you. This was to be a death trap for both of us. How long were you supposed to keep me here?"

"Until someone came to pay me," the little man quivered. "The man who would come — I don't know his name . . . would pretend to put you in a furnace . . . then everybody would laugh. Big joke."

"Very funny," Joe said. "Like

Dracula. I should report this to the police and charge you with kidnapping, but I couldn't make it stick. So let's get the hell out of here before there's something to report with no one to report it."

JOE RETURNED the little man, who called himself Squirly, to the church parking lot. Squirly climbed onto a motorcycle and blasted into twilight. A black Lincoln Continental roared to power and blasted after him. Joe followed. It was clear that Burke, driving the Continental, was concerned with destroying evidence. Squirly might squeal, little as he knew. The bingo game hadn't ended soon enough. Plans for hilarious cremations had been stymied by time. The stallers had stalled too long.

The Honda roared down Green Street in the direction of the freeway. When it reached the wall sequestering Caltech, the Lincoln spurted past the motorcycle and screeched to a halt. The Honda swerved to avoid a collision and crashed into the wall. Gasoline exploded into screams.

Joe waited until the Lincoln left, fortunately in the opposite direction from where he was parked. Then he drove to the nearest service station and reported the "accident" to *Tribune* re-write. An unidentified motorcyclist had crashed into a wall and burned to death. There could be no mention of the cause. Premature identi-

fication of Burke as the killer would prohibit proof of other, more diabolical, killings. The only way to stop the Chief's nose from itching was to thwart another killing and catch the would-be-killers at the scene of the attempted crime. That would take a bit of doing. The third bingo murder could conceivably be accomplished successfully. Again, there would be no autopsy if the cause of death were judged coronary occlusion. A coincidence can be a coincidence — three times in a row.

The thought "in a row" rang in his head. Was it possible that those marked for death were seated by section, table and seat to form a vertical line, as in bingo? It would be interesting to determine the seats allocated to Pamela Smythe, Edna Thornton, Jean Burke and Ron Hendricks. Judy could tell him, if she had done her homework. He would call her first thing when he got home.

IT WAS NO LONGER UNUSUAL for his apartment door to be ajar. But it was unusual for the room to be dark. Even at twilight, in broad daylight for that matter, a mole would need some illumination. The sun rose and sank in the wrong directions. There was little outside light from the north.

"Judy?" he called, entering cautiously. There was no answer. He headed for a bedside lamp.

"Stay where you are," a gruff

voice ordered. "We're taking a ride."

Joe whirled, sensing the man was near, and landed a left to the stomach and a right to the jaw. The man lurched backward. Another man grabbed Joe's arms, pinioning them behind him. He broke away with a kick to the crotch. The assailant yelled and stooped in pain. Joe kicked again — to the chin. The man catapulted to the floor. Then the lights that were out really went out. Joe felt a blow to the head and rubbery legs, nothing more. The burly man from the crematory leaned over him as he shook his head awake.

"You're a lucky pigeon," the man growled. "This is a warning. A last chance to escape the oven, because you're a newspaper reporter. It has been decided that you would be an unnecessary risk. Your paper knows as much, and as little, as you do. That's not conclusive, only threatening. Probe further and you will dive into Hades head first, wrapped in a sheet."

III

JOE MARVELED that a hulk who shoved caskets into flames for a living could articulate a warning so well. Perhaps he was a college graduate who majored in football, but failed to make the Rams. At any rate, he had made himself abundantly clear. Vivian and

Burke knew that telling facts would be missing in any indictment against them. A reporter who had insufficient evidence to call the police was no threat to their plans, so long as the status remained quo. They were gambling, at least temporarily, on his cowardice. Little did they know how much they knew. He admitted to being a devout coward. What reporter in his right mind would stick his head into a furnace to prove a story he could never write? But on the other hand, how could he face Judy if he didn't? As his parents had quoted him as a child: "That's no argue." Pit Judy's precious self against danger and what was dangerous?

He went to the bedside phone to call her, thinking he must take time soon to know her. She was an enigma — at once a breath of fresh air and a smothering force that left him breathless. There couldn't be a Judy, yet there was. She had told him in their brief encounter that her father had been a doctor and that she was a registered nurse with no practical experience.

"Father taught me the majesty of healing and the saintliness of nursing," she had explained. What kind of explanation was that? A qualified nurse who wasn't a nurse in practice. It probably meant that she had fulfilled her father's hope for her, merely because he had hoped. That would be something a Judy would do.

"Hi," he said when she an-

swered the phone with: "This is Judy."

"Hi, yourself," she responded. "Why do I rate such an informal salutation?"

"Because you're Judy," Joe said seriously. "I've been thinking. How about two or three kids and a home in Sonoma County?"

"As you wish," she sighed. "Awfully glad you asked."

"Great," Joe said soberly. "Now that we've settled our future, let's ponder the present. It's a mess."

He told her about Vivian and Burke and their plot to kill Ron Hendricks and Jean Burke — but not their threat to shove himself into eternal flames. Nobility was for the noble. He felt disqualified. Love was no substitute for valor.

"I need to know the names of those in the charity league who are subject to potential coronary occlusion," he said. "Also their seat locations. And I need to look at the seat occupied by Pamela Smythe."

"Done," Judy replied. "Coronary occlusion potential, in addition to my mother and Pamela Smythe, are Edna Thornton, Jean Burke, Ron Hendricks ... and Lester Burke. Pamela Smythe sat in the second section, second seat. I'll get other seat locations for you as soon as I can."

JOE REFLECTED on another conversation with Judy as he steered

the Chevy wagon toward St. Andrew's Church. His mission of the moment seemed less important than what she had said.

"The first will be the only," she had breathed as they lay nude together. "I've said that many times during necking sessions, always adding 'you're not the one.' I wouldn't be here if I planned to say that to you."

Joe had remembered the advice of his father: "Treat a woman as she wants to be treated, but never violate a virginity unless you intend to keep it." Stupid, perhaps, in light of today's enlightenment, but a solid path to travel. No premature responsibility. Marriage was a mating of souls, not bodies. Oneness was more than consummation of desire.

He arrived at the church in darkness, grateful that the House of God was always open. He could investigate without trespassing. Descending the stairs to the basement, the thought crossed his mind that he *was* trespassing. It seemed unseemly to sneak into a place of worship with a purpose other than worship. Not that he was that religious. He believed that a medicine man in the jungle chanted to the same God everybody else did. It was that murder had been committed here and the bottom of a chair was about to prove it.

He followed his nose to the storage room, hoping it was pointed in the right direction. He

came to a door, entered a room beyond it and groped for a light switch. The room blazed into focus as his eyes adjusted. Stacked against two walls of the room were horizontal planks with folded up chairs affixed vertically. Assuming they were stacked in sections, he went to the second stack. The outer plank was numbered "Section 2 — Row 1." He pushed it aside and knelt in front of the second chair of Row 2. It was labeled PAMELA SMYTHE. He pulled the chair open and ducked his head beneath it to inspect the bottom. Amplifier mounted by suction cup. A faint, larger circle overlapping the cup.

"Circle of death!" Joe gasped, shocked despite preconditioning that it would be there.

JOE IDLED through the balance of the week. Nothing could be accomplished until Monday. Hiram Jackson took a dim view of the inactivity and scratched his nose incessantly. But for once he agreed that patience might be a virtue.

"Monday, then!" Jackson snapped Saturday when Joe explained that he couldn't act sooner. "But I suggest that you buy a one-way bus ticket back to Sonoma County when you receive your final *Tribune* check, unearned. Someone else will take over Tuesday morning."

The telephone roused Joe from

sleep. Since yesterday had been Sunday spent with Judy at the beach, this must be Monday. He fumbled for the receiver.

"Joe Gallagher," he yawned.

"You left word at headquarters for me to call you first thing Monday," Bob Simmons said, chidingly: "Wouldn't an alarm clock have served as well?"

"Alarm clocks are raucous," Joe replied drowsily. "They jangle. You're dulcet."

"Flatterer," Simmons chuckled. "What does it cost me?"

"No cost," Joe smiled, glad there was a Bob Simmons. "A reward. Your picture in the *Tribune*."

"Let's see," Simmons mused facetiously, "I'm not dead, so it's not an obituary. I'm not engaged, so it's not a marriage. I'm not social, so it's not an 'among those present' at the affair of some kind. So what ..."

"An arrest," Joe interjected. "You are going to arrest the murderers of Susan Wicks and Pamela Smythe when they attempt a third murder this afternoon."

"And I'm the king of Siam!" Simmons exploded. "That record is scratched. It plays the same nonsense over and over."

"Would I lie to you?" Joe asked, "Over and over?"

"I demand sanctuary of the Fifth Amendment," Simmons growled, "to preserve a strained friendship."

"Then keep your mouth shut and meet me at St. Andrew's church," Joe ordered. "This afternoon, one o'clock. Parking lot. Bring handcuffs for two."

He banged the receiver before Simmons could answer, hoping the phone wouldn't ring again. It didn't. Joe stretched and sprawled back onto the bed. There was plenty of time before he had to shave, shower, get dressed, poach an egg, and make coffee and toast.

The phone jolted him from sleep again. It would be Simmons, he thought dejectedly. Dammit, couldn't that dumb deputy sheriff see an opportunity when he saw one?"

"Okay, stupid," he said with a shrug in his voice. "So I'll call the police."

"Do that," the voice at the other end of the line responded, "and you girl will become ashes sooner than later."

It was Lester Burke.

"You have Judy?" Joe asked frantically, lurching from the bed.

"Yes," Burke intoned. "You disobeyed orders. You went to the church last night. You were followed, so don't deny it. Since you care so little for your own life, we decided to take a life you care about."

"Unless ..." Joe faltered.

"Unless nothing," Burke said with finality. "Your Judy knows too much, as you do. And your friend 'stupid.' Who is he?"

"My boss," Joe lied. "Hiram Jackson. City editor of the *Tribune*. I told him I could solve the bingo murders today, by myself. He thinks I'm nuts. He told me to 'call the police' if I'm sure. 'The paper doesn't need a hero,' he said. 'Just a story.'"

"So you call your boss 'stupid,'" Burke said with obvious disbelief.

"I resigned my job Friday," Joe said firmly. "I have nothing to lose by calling my boss 'stupid.' I'm returning to Sonoma County tomorrow to become editor of my father's weekly newspaper. I wanted a by-line on a big story to give me prestige in Sonoma. The old cliché, you know: 'Local boy makes good.'"

Silence blasted. Joe waited for a response, hoping his explanation would seem naive enough to be true.

"Leave today," Burke said finally. "No by-line. No big story. No hero. Your Judy will be at Bellevue Crematory by noon. Come for her and you both will die. Call the police and she will be incinerated at the first siren sound. No witnesses. No proof. A routine cremation. One is scheduled for that hour."

Joe got the picture. Judy would die, regardless of what he did. And he would die as soon as a hired killer caught up with him, wherever. It was a game of offset: Judy Wicks and Joe Gallagher against Burke's wife Jean and a

man named Hendricks. Or was it to be checkmate: chess against bingo? Incongruous as the parallel seemed there was a chance, albeit slim, for all four contemplated victims to survive. He had to do what he knew Burke expected him to do: be at Bellevue Crematory by noon, sans police.

JOE SHAVED AND SHOWERED, because there was time. It was not quite eleven o'clock and the crematory was less than thirty minutes away. Clean-shaven or stubbled. Fresh or sweaty. The furnace would accept him either way. But he wanted Judy to see and smell him at his best. He splashed aftershave lotion on his face and cologne on his chest, thinking ironically that aroma and lack of whiskers would add or detract nothing from the weight of his ashes. He would weigh seven pounds, six ounces in a can, the same as he had weighed when he squalled at the first slap of a hand.

He donned slacks, loafers and a Hawaiian shirt. It seemed appropriate to dress in beach wear, ready to meet the giant wave that had been forming all his life — a wave about to break, grinding hopes and dreams into sand.

The Chevy wagon thrust through fog, termed "morning low clouds" by weathermen. *Wouldn't you know*, he thought, *that the sun would hide when most needed, to light a way to hope.*

There was hope in the crematory parking lot when the Chevy's lights filtered through mist to a single car. A Volkswagen. How many people could fit into a bug? Four at the most. Two probably, including Judy. That meant a possible one-on-one encounter with the assigned assassin. It wouldn't be Burke, who would soon be sanctoriously in church, playing bingo for charity. It probably would be the brawny would-be-Ram, he reasoned, and alone. Burke could ill afford to trust more than one man — even temporarily. Two, and certainly three, would be too many. How many tongues could be silenced without one being heard? It had to be one.

Joe felt relieved, for no good reason that he could think of. One could be enough. Especially a big one. He left the station wagon and walked slowly up the steps to the bronze door of the crematory.

"It's Gallagher," he shouted, rapping. "I'm expected."

He heard a click, signalling that the door had been unlocked from the inside. He pulled the door open and felt a glancing blow of knuckles against his cheek. He staggered and fell, sprawling on his stomach. Rolling onto his back near the furnace wall, he grasped the wrist of the brawny one who lunged on top of him, knife blade gleaming. As he struggled with both hands to keep the blade

from reaching his throat, he saw Judy struggle to her feet. Hands bound and feet hobbled, she bounced around the marble floor like an elf on a pogo stick. Erupting into the air, she propelled her moccasins against the back of the brawny one's head. He lurched over Joe, bashing his head against the furnace wall. Blood gushed from his nose and mouth. Joe crawled to where Judy lay squirming on her back.

"I landed where the padding is," she smiled. "that's one good thing."

"Very good," Joe said, reaching for the knife beside the brawny one's fractured skull. "Mother nature can't be all bad. She provides cushions."

"In the right places," Judy added. "Also in proper abundance."

"We won't go into that," Joe said as he cut the ropes binding Judy's hands and feet. "Leave it for now that the Lord knew what he was doing when he fashioned your posterior."

"Only my posterior?" Judy pouted, shedding the ropes.

"We'll talk about the front of you later," Joe said, patting her cheek. "It could take a lifetime."

"I have them both," Judy said, rising to her feet and pacing impatiently, hands on hips. "A front and a lifetime."

"You almost lost them," Joe said, motioning with his head

toward the man on the floor. "And you still may. There will be more where he came from until we eliminate the source."

He sprang to his feet at the thought and glanced at his wrist-watch. It was 12:40. In 20 minutes Vivian Spence could draw a fatal number from her squirrel cage, if she dispensed with opening chatter about charity for someone other than one's self.

"Come," he said, wishing he had time to kiss and enfold her. "We have lives to save, including our own."

THE MOTOR RESPONDED to ignition with a roar, the rear tires to full pedal with a screech. Joe's head snapped back as the wagon hurtled from the parking lot into a 35-mile-per-hour zone at 60. Passing obedient drivers as though their cars were parked, he watched the dashboard for the dread flash of red signalling HOT. The old Chevy had a history of overheating when overpressed. It preferred gradual acceleration to cruising speed, and that not above 50.

He also was mindful of another red light that could flash in Pasadena, and usually did. There were as many police cars on the city's streets as there were speeding cars. It had been worked out to an exact science. The mayor, the chief of police and the city council had to be paid.

Two blocks from the church,

both signals flared. The dashboard flared red. Ahead, flashing lights heralded the approach of a black-and-white, siren screaming. Joe braked slightly and swerved the steaming wagon into the church parking lot, barely missing the police car which scraped bumper against blacktop to avoid a collision.

Joe switched off the ignition, braked to a stop and slid from the wagon, motioning Judy to move behind the wheel.

"Tell the cops I'll sign the ticket later," he said calmly. "And tell me, where does Hendricks sit?"

"I don't know," Judy replied. "He's a guest."

"Hold it, Joel" Bob Simmons shouted, emerging from the black-and-white. "Why the hurry?"

"Don't ask," Joe shouted back. "Follow me. Search the podium for a gadget."

He double-stepped the church steps and the basement stairs, where he lurched toward chair number five, fifth row, section five, like a baseball player diving ahead of a throw. Ron Hendricks had to be there as the terminus of a hypothetical bingo line from the chair of section one to the last chair of section five.

The momentum of his plunge carried him on his stomach to where he reached and jerked away the amplifier beneath the target chair.

He heard a gurgling sound and saw a female hand reach for the

amplifier under chair number four to his left. He intercepted, instinctively, grabbing the female fist as it grasped a bulbous amplifier. Tearing the amplifier from the small grasp, he lurched to his feet in time to see a blond man wretch and collapse across the table, taking chips and bingo cards to the floor as he slumped on top of the sprawled body of Vivian Spence.

Lester Burke lay dead or dying, vomit drooling from sagging lips. Someone dragged the stricken man across Vivian to an open space amid the converging crowd. Vivian pulled herself to her feet, clutching the puke-spattered table, and looked down at Burke.

"Goodbye, louse," she hissed.

Bob Simmons pushed through the crowd, holding a metal object at arm's length above his head.

"Remote control," he shouted above the din.

Joe nodded, raising the amplifier for Simmons to see.

"Too many kilocycles."

He turned to Vivian as Simmons reached her and snapped handcuffs on her wrists.

"Why?" he asked.

"They kill snakes, don't they?" she shrugged.

Arms encircled Joe's waist from behind.

"My place or yours?" Judy asked.

"As you wish," Joe replied. "I surrender."

STAIRWAY TO NOWHERE

by EDWARD D. HOCH and JOSEPH CUMMINGS

The Girl Walked Up the Stairs, and Somewhere
Between the Bottom Step and the Top, She
Disappeared — Vanished Completely. Then There
Was the Problem of the Missing Diamond ...

THEY PAUSED FOR A MOMENT beneath the street light. The young girl with the loose blue coat and the hat with the feather in it glanced around nervously. While the young man fumbled for a cigarette, he watched her.

"What's the matter, Rachel?" he asked, concerned. "You act as if a bug-eyed monster is going to jump out at you from the next alley."

Her smile was a little frozen. Her voice would have been soft except for the slight ragged edge on it. "I'm sorry, Jim, I guess I'm nervous. Arranging that jewel exhibit, handling all those fabulous stones, is enough to make anyone jittery."

Jim Newman tossed the burnt match into the frosty night and inhaled cigarette smoke deeply into his lungs. "I know, I know! And next week the museum will probably have you getting the willies over a display of Tz'u Chou peach-bloom porcelain. Then you won't pick up a dime store teacup for fear of dropping it. I hope it'll be

different when we're married. I can't stand skittish wives."

Rachel Morgan looked up into his usually amiable grey eyes and sighed. "If I didn't do it —"

"What about Evelyn Gunther?"

"I can't let her take all the responsibility, Jim. After all, she's my best friend as well as my co-worker and —"

"Your best *girl* friend, Rachel!" corrected Jim.

"Silly! Nobody can take your place. Well, you know how the museum depends on me for those things."

"Too much," he said, a little bitterly.

"Let's not argue. I know you're grumbling because we couldn't go to the Christmas dance, but . . ."

A few snowflakes drifted down and hit Jim in the face. He glanced at his wristwatch, then took her possessively by the arm. "Okay. It isn't seven o'clock yet. If we get a move on, we can have dinner, then catch a show afterwards."

"But, Jim —"

"No back talk, young lady. What you need is a night out. You need me to cheer you up. Watch the curb! We'll make a whole crazy night of it."

They moved on, along a dim block to the front steps of Rachel's apartment house. They hurried up the steps and into the gloomy vestibule.

He stopped her there. "You haven't said yes. But I warn you. I won't listen to no."

He pulled her closer in the faint light. "If I kissed you now —"

"No, Jim. Not now." She drew away. Her white teeth showed briefly as she laughed a little. She turned her shoulder and took something that jangled out of her handbag. It was her keyring. She handed it to him. "See if there's any mail in my box, like a darling. I'll start up."

Jim didn't let the door slam after her. He stuck his foot in it. The letterbox rattled open and shut. He stared disgustedly at the card in his hand. *Send today for the Giant New Cookbook*. He grunted and slipped the card into his overcoat pocket.

Another part of his mind was registering sounds. He could hear Rachel's high-heeled pumps climbing the stairs. One, two, three, four, five, six steps she took.

Jim turned around in the vestibule. The footsteps on the stairs had halted.

"Ji . . ." It might have been the

beginning of a scream, or it might have been nothing at all. Jim felt that something was wrong.

He flung himself in to the foot of the stairs. They reached up, straight and narrow, to the darkened floor above.

"Rachel! Rachel! What happened?"

He came to a dead stop.

She was not on the stairs!

She had gone up only six of the twenty-one steps — and yet she was not there!

Something gleamed dully on the eighth step. He stumbled up to it and picked it up. It was a gold compact with the initials *RM* engraved on it. His Christmas present to Rachel. She'd had it in her hand only a few moments before.

He might have done any number of things in the seconds that followed. What he did was run up the stairs.

He dashed up the rest of the way, turning the banister rail at the top, running to her door at the end of the first flight.

He knocked loudly.

There was no answer.

The door was locked. Of course — he still had the keyring clutched in his sweating hand.

Somehow he knew that she was gone out of that house and his stomach was contracting into a cold lump . . .

There was a shuffle at the top carpeted step as someone climbed the stairs behind him. He whirled

around, expecting to find that in some miraculous way he had passed Rachel and that she was here again. His face fell with disappointment. It was a man.

The man loomed at the stair-head, big and fat, and sent a huge shadow swarming upward from the light below. Snow was sprinkled on his battered white campaign hat and on the capacious shoulders of the black wrapascal. On his fiddle-sized feet were big scaly rubbers with ridged red soles.

He had a bullfrog voice and beetling brows. "What'd you do with the gal?" he asked menacingly.

Now Jim felt that the wigwag of those thick eyebrows might scare the living daylight out of some people. The narrow blue eyes could get as hard as sapphires. The ruddy jowls looked grim and there was a smudge of purplish discoloration on his several chins. Altogether an alarming spectacle.

In his anxiety over Rachel's disappearance, Jim's voice rode high. "Who are you?"

The rubbers scuffed forward. "Who'm I? Ain't nobody told you? I'm Senator Banner!"

Jim said, distraught: "All right! So you're Senator Banner!"

Banner drew himself up augustly. "I dabble in crime."

"You'd better watch out," said Jim wryly. "Some day the police'll catch you."

"Ketch me?" Banner chuckled. "That's a good one. I work with the police, showing 'em where they made all their mistakes."

"What do you want with Rachel?"

Banner peered around. "I follered her from Audubon Hotel. I wanted to keep an eye on her to be sure nothing happened."

Jim stepped back. "You *followed* us?"

"Yass! I do a purty slick job. You didn't spot me at all, did you?"

"No, I —"

"Where is she?"

Jim swallowed. He didn't know what this was all about. He had to tell somebody. "She's gone."

"Gone!" Banner gave a genuine start. This development was totally unexpected.

Jim quickly told him exactly what happened. "And we've been watching those stairs all the time. Whatever happened to her, she must still be in this house."

"Wal, sir!" Banner thoughtfully rubbed his chins. Touching the discoloration, he winced. "That's a burn," he explained. "I played Santa Claus for the kids at the orphanage. One of the bas — boys set off firecrackers in my beard . . . But this, this's serious. I don't like it. Rachel," he said slowly, "is involved in a crime."

"Crime!" Jim was shocked.

Banner grunted. "Get busy with those keys and open the door."

Let's take a hinge at her apartment."

They went in and lit the lights. It was a three-room flat with a couple of Grandma Moses reproductions on the walls, some washed nylon stockings draped over the shower curtain in the bathroom, and a bean pot planted with lily-of-the-valley pips on the bedroom windowsill. But the flat was empty of Rachel, as Jim had feared.

Outside it was snowing harder now; the fat flakes hitting the windowpanes, fluttering past the street lamps.

Banner had thrown off his hat and wraprascal and a gooseberry-green scarf. He had a mane of grizzled hair and he went trotting around in a quaint frock coat and baggy grey britches. He looked dusty as he plodded back into the living room, the rump of a dead cigar in his mouth.

Jim turned from the window. Somewhere Rachel Morgan . . .

Banner was shaking his big square head. "I'd better call the cops. Me and Acting Captain Tom Rector of the Missing Persons Bureau are thicker'n thieves. Ordinarily she'd have to be missing for twenty-four hourse before —"

Jim nodded stiffly. "Call them, Senator."

When Banner put down the phone again, Jim asked tensely: "What crime did you say Rachel is mixed up in?"

Banner flopped down into a chintzy chair and tried to be comfortable. "That's just it. I dunno."

"But you said —"

"I said a lotta things. Okeh. I was in my room at the Audubon Hotel a little after six this evening. Second-class joint. I'm stopping there to be toastmaster at a furniture salesmen's convention. I used to operate outta Grand Rapids myself in my salad days. Wal, sir! I heard voices — man and woman — in the adjoining room, number 403. I ain't no transom peeper. Get that outta your head. But when I heard the word *crime* mentioned more'n once I reared up like an old fire hoss that smells smoke. I didn't get all of it. The door was too thick. Just snatches of talk, yunnerstand. A *creep* and a *crumb*. That's what the man was being called, on both sides. But he said he had a thundering good excuse for doing the thing he'd done. He was all burning up with love for her. You need have no doubts that he'd gone kerplunk into a puddle of passion. And it wasn't all roses and raptures. Then, my boy, then they started to wrangle over it."

"It?" Jim felt stupefied.

"Never mentioned it by name. The gal — that was Rachel — said that it was worth at least half a million and she'd better get it back to the museum as fast as she could." Banner spread out his

hands. "So, when she left the room, I tailed her. My only purpose was to make sure that whatever she had *did* get back safely. On the way out I stopped at the desk and inquired about the occupant of 403. His name's Leonard Slattery. Mean anything to you?"

"Not a thing," said Jim glumly.

Rachel, carrying something worth a fortune and missing. The situation was more ominous now.

Banner sat there scowling.

At 7:20 Captain Tom Rector arrived with a couple of men. He was frail-looking with a stubborn face and a recurrent stomach ailment. Jim blurted out the whole story again. Captain Rector looked as if he'd like to run Jim in for intoxication, only Banner was there to back it up.

Captain Rector rubbed the day's growth of blue-black stubble on his thin cheeks. "What's she look like?"

"About five feet two," murmured Jim, "weight close to one-ten, blonde hair, blue eyes, a face you remember, like . . ."

"Got a picture?"

Jim pulled out his wallet and handed over a snapshot, after a lingering look at it. "We were going to be married . . ."

A snort came from Banner's chair. "Dammit! This's all wrong! You sure you two lovebirds didn't have a fight, mebbe, and she —?"

Jim turned toward him. "You

were watching us. You saw me meet Rachel in the street and walk her home. Did you see us fighting?"

Banner looked sharp. "You had something like a mild hassle under a lamppost. But let it go."

"I can explain that," said Jim hurriedly. "We didn't agree about her job. It gave her the jitters. I wanted her to quit so that we could be married right away."

"How long've you known her?"

"About six months. But she wanted to keep on working for a while."

Banner got up with a fat man's grunt. He looked sourly at the dead cigar in his chubby fingers. "Where'd she work?"

"At the Skiff Museum of Art. Her job was arranging exhibits there." He caught himself speaking of her in the past tense and he shivered.

"She was taking something back to the museum," muttered Banner.

"What are you jabbering about?" asked Captain Rector.

"Wait a minnit," said Banner. "I wanna make a call."

While Captain Rector sent his men out to question the tenants, Banner stood mumbling into the phone. At last he trotted back to his chair.

"I tried the museum. The night guard don't come on till eight. But the johnny I talked to said that Rachel ain't been there since quitting time."

"We'll have to sit and wait," said Captain Rector, "till my boys go through the house. She may be in one of the other apartments."

Jim started to shake his head.

Banner briefed Captain Rector on what he'd overheard at the Audubon Hotel.

Captain Rector ventured his opinion. "Loaded with dynamite!"

Half an hour later his men reported back. They had found no trace of Rachel.

Captain Rector said: "Your girl's not in this house now. That's sure. The roof door is locked inside. So's the back door to the yard. So if she went in like you said, she must have left the same way."

A hollow groan came from Banner, still camped in the chintzy chair.

Jim said: "But . . . she couldn't have, Captain. She went up those stairs. And she didn't come down. I picked up her compact."

The compact reflected light from its gold surface on the table.

Banner said in a sepulchral voice: "Which she dropped as she was snatched up bodily into thin air."

Jim gasped: "I was watching those stairs every minute!"

"Take it easy, Mr. Newman," said Captain Rector. "We'll find her."

Banner sucked noisily on the unlit cigar in the quiet room.

"We'll find her, Mr. Newman," said Captain Rector again, as if taking a vow. He nodded grimly at his men. They left. He was preparing to go. Banner and Jim walked slowly down the stairs with him to the front hall.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Jim desperately.

"Go home and take it easy, Mr. Newman. We'll send you word when we locate her." Captain Rector glanced around toward the cellar steps. "She isn't down there either. I had a man search the cellar and look into the furnace. The only door down there is bolted inside. I never saw a tighter house."

The Captain's methods were too laborious for Jim. "I don't care where she isn't!" he cried out. "I want to know where she is!"

"In due time, mister, in due time," advised Captain Rector. "Where can we get in touch with you?"

Jim sighed and slumped against the cellar door. "At the home address I gave you. Or at the *Times-Forum* office. I have the science editor desk there."

Banner perked up. "Zat so? I'm a science fiction fan myself. I got all the comic books on —"

But nobody was listening to him.

Captain Rector and his men were going out into the snow. They left Banner and Jim standing in the lower hallway at the foot of the stairs.

Somewhere a clock chimed eight times.

"I'm not going home, Senator," said Jim.

"I didn't think you would."

"I'm going to the —"

He paused. A girl was entering through the front door. Jim saw snow on her blonde hair and for an instant his heart leaped. Then Evelyn Gunther came in.

She was taller and fairer than Rachel, and though she wore canasta eyeglasses with black oblong frames, she was in some ways better looking. Jim had first met her a few months ago. She worked with Rachel at the museum. Now she and Jim were friends. Jim somehow felt a little better when he saw her push open the door. She could be very comforting.

"Jim!" she said. "What's this all about? I could hardly understand you on the phone."

"Evelyn, I hate to drag you into a mess like this, but you're the only good friend Rachel has in town and I thought that by talking to you —"

"You said Rachel was gone — disappeared!"

Banner had been puttering around underneath the stairs. He lumbered out, looking like a waltzing bear, and he startled Evelyn.

Jim introduced them.

"Meetcha!" mumbled Banner. "There's nothing under there but dust."

"The Senator," explained Jim

lately, "has found missing people before." He told Evelyn what had happened, making it clearer this time.

"But that's impossible, Jim! You must be mistaken!"

Banner had been silently studying her. "He ain't mistaken, cheesecake. I was right behind him all the way."

"That," said Jim, "is the fantastic part of it. I paused in the vestibule for a moment, heard her go up six steps, call out my name, and then . . . nothing!"

Evelyn Gunther sighed. "You admit that you two had a spat about her job. She's probably out walking it off somewhere."

Jim felt disheartened. "The police thought so too until —" He stopped when he saw Banner's forefinger to his shushing lips.

She had jerked around suddenly. "Were those men I passed on the stoop the police?"

"Yes."

"Jim are you crazy? Just because Rachel is out of your sight for a few minutes, you immediately think that something horrible has happened to her." She laughed quietly. "I wish I had a man who worried that much about me."

Banner cleared his throat. "There's more here than meets the eye." He sniffled. "Yaas! A lot more. Where's all that nice smellum coming from?"

She looked at him coquettishly from the corners of her eyes.

"My perfume, Senator. *Seduction*."

"Ain't smelled anything like it since I kissed that famous movie actress right in the middle of Grand Central Terminal. Gar-rumph! Wanna come upstairs and take a gander at the flat, cheese-cake?"

Evelyn moved silently up the stairs ahead of them. They went over the flat again, but Evelyn could indicate no sign, no clue, that would point to Rachel's whereabouts.

It was nearly 8:25 when they finally gave up. Evelyn slipped back into her fitted coat and started for the door. "Well, I've got to get my sleep. Tomorrow's a busy day at the museum."

"Whatcha doing?" asked Banner mildly.

"We open up the jewelry exhibit at nine. What form of art do you patronize, Senator?"

"Art?" Banner stuck his thumbs into his fire-engine-red suspenders and snapped them. "I gotta seegar box at home fulla old seashells and Chinese laundry tickets. Yass. And a silk parasol given me by the madam of a disorderly house in New Orleans. Quite a gal. Wore red stockings, took Spanish fly, practiced voodoo, and weighed close to two-hundred-and—"

Jim put in hastily: "Would you like me to see you home, Evelyn?"

"I can manage," she replied, —"thanks." She gave Banner a

broad wink. "When I see Rachel in the morning, Jim, I'll tell her what a worrisome man she's got for a boy friend."

Through the window they watched her leave the house and cross the street in the snow. Jim lit a cigaret and inhaled tremulously.

"What's your impression of that sweet potato?" asked Banner.

"I wouldn't want to be her boy friend. Half her salary goes for that perfume. You smelled it. She spends the rest of her year's pay on a two-week vacation trip to Jamaica. But she's a hard-working kid. Too bad she couldn't help us."

Banner pattered over to where Rachel's compact lay on the table and pocketed it. "I'm leery of everything tonight. Y'see, Jim, I know how Rachel disappeared."

"Then you know —"

"No. I don't know where she is now. She may be in danger. That's why we gotta pussyfoot around."

"We can't stay here. Where can we go?"

"The Audubon Hotel," said Banner. "Where else?"

AT THE HOTEL the night clerk looked at the key nesting in the pigeonhole, then he turned back to Banner and Jim.

"Mr. Slattery has gone out," he said.

"Where'd he go?" questioned Jim.

The clerk looked bland. "I never asked him, sir."

Banner looked stern. "What time'd he leave?"

"About seven-thirty. He leaves the same time every night."

They went out into the street again. The snowflakes were still sifting down, thick and heavy. Banner hailed a cab, they piled in, and he directed it to be driven to the Skiff Museum of Art.

The museum faced the frosty winter wonderland of the Park. They got out of the cab at the black iron gateway, tramped on through the gates to the broad stone steps. On one side of the shoveled walk somebody — kids, probably — had built a large snowman from yesterday's snow. It had two lumps of coal for eyes, a dripping icicle for a nose, and a corncob pipe jutting from a leering gash of a mouth.

Jim, glancing at it, tried to keep his teeth from chattering.

At the top of the stone steps, Banner rattled the locked doors. Dim lights shone inside. Jim pressed the night bell.

In a minute a man in a grey uniform, a pistol in a side holster, opened the door and inquired what they wanted. Banner pushed in, opening a large wallet to show his bona fides, which included a special police card.

"It's about Rachel Morgan," said Banner in an ominous tone. "She's disappeared."

The guard looked dumbfounded. "Huh? Disappeared?"

They were in now. The door

slammed and the guard's flashlight bobbed. Mincing shadows. Eyes in the dark. The painted eyes of the mummy cases. The atmosphere of the tomb.

"I don't understand," said the guard. He was swallow-eyed with gaunt cheeks and wiry black hair. "How'd she disappear? I saw her only a few minutes ago."

"What!" roared Banner.

"Where?" cried Jim.

"Passing across the end of one of the galleries."

"Did you speak to her?" snapped Banner.

"No, she wasn't close enough," said the guard.

"Are you sure it was Rachel?" said Jim.

"I should know Rachel Morgan when I see her," said the guard slowly and with conviction.

They shuffled farther into the museum as they talked. Around them stood pale marble Greek statuary like so many frozen corpses.

Jim fixed the guard with his eyes. This man seemed to be holding something back. It was in his manner. He knew something. Jim's gaze narrowed suspiciously. "Who are you?"

"Just a museum employee. Why —?"

"What's your name?"

The guard glanced sideways into the morose shadows and back again. "Leonard Slattery," he said.

Jim felt his pulses jump. He

heard Banner expel a gusty breath.

"You're the man we're looking for!" Jim's voice rolled and echoed among the statues.

Slattery looked defiant. "I think both of you are wacky!" But it was an uneasy defiance.

Jim grabbed Slattery's tunic. "You gave Rachel something in Room 403 tonight! Something that's endangered her life!"

"Take your hands off me!"

Banner was being strangely silent. Jim didn't look around. In Jim a fierce resentment for Slattery was raging. He had a sickening thought that perhaps Rachel didn't love him at all. She might be in love with this swine. Jim felt like batting his lug ears off.

He said through his teeth: "Why should Rachel risk her life for you?"

Slattery wrenched himself free, stepped back, and made a menacing gesture toward the holstered revolver. "So help me, I'll use this. You crashed in here. You attacked me. I'm paid to protect this place — and myself!"

"What does Rachel mean to you?" cried Jim recklessly. "Is she in love with you?"

"In love with me? You must be nuts! I'm her half-brother!"

Jim sank down on a limestone bench, his knees trembling. Rachel had never told him about having a half-brother, but it could be true nevertheless. Jim lifted his

head to see how much this news had affected Banner. But Banner was gone.

In this vast space even Banner's two-hundred-eighty pounds could dematerialize without leaving a ripple.

There was an awkward silence amid the Greek statuary. Jim wanted to look for Rachel, only he didn't want to leave Slattery alone. And Slattery seemed to be anchored there. Both men eyed each other.

Jim heard faint hollow sounds, as of somebody moving about, but he never stirred from the bench.

A mammoth granite door jamb from the tomb of Ramses II made the entrance to the Egyptian Wing. The archway was inky black. Something came shambling out, dark and flapping. Jim started, then he saw Banner's white hat.

Banner came plowing up to them. Over his arm he carried a loose garment.

"I found these," said Banner. "In the mummy room."

Wide-eyed, Jim looked at what Banner held up.

Banner said: "Rachel's hat and coat!"

It wasn't necessary for Banner to tell him. He'd recognize the loose blue coat and the hat with the feather in it any place.

Banner was shaking his head solemnly. "No Rachel."

"My God!" breathed Jim. "She's disappeared again!"

Banner wheeled suddenly and glared at Slattery. "We had enough nonsense! You're gonna tell us the truth!"

"He's —" Jim started to explain.

"I know," said Banner. "I stayed long enough to discover he's related to Rachel . . . How'd Rachel get in here tonight, Slattery?"

Slattery gulped. "She asked me to leave the front door unlocked until she was in."

"When'd you see her?"

"Around eight-forty-five."

Banner gravely consulted a hunting-case watch that was as big as an artichoke. "That'd be ten minutes before we came. What'd she come here for?"

"I don't know!"

"You're a liar, Slattery. She was covering up a crime. You gave her something to bring back here. What was it?"

A cunning light crept into Slattery's eyes. "You don't know? . . . Then I won't say another word! You can torture me, but I won't say another word!"

He clamped his jaws tightly together.

Banner looked utterly disgusted with himself. "Of all the prize boobs, I'm —"

Jim felt savagery churning inside him. "I'll make him open up!"

"Knock it off!" ordered Banner. "No third degrees!"

"I only —"

Jim didn't finish. They heard high heels making little clicking sounds on the polished marble floor and they all spun around.

Evelyn Gunther walked into their midst.

Questions popped.

Evelyn answered with a rather wry smile. "I didn't want to sleep after all. I kept thinking about Rachel and the museum. I came straight over here to see if I could do anything. The front door was open, so I came in . . ."

Jim blurted: "Rachel's been here!" He held up the hat and coat. "Have you seen her, Evelyn?"

Evelyn frowned behind her canasta eyeglasses and shook her head. "No, Jim, I haven't."

"Then," said Banner glumly, "for the second time tonight she's vanished into thin air . . . Only this time it scares me!"

Jim broke into a cold sweat, wondering what sort of horrendous hobgoblins could scare Banner.

Banner wouldn't say another word about it. His rubbers squeaking on the floor, he herded everybody into the main office and started phoning. He phoned Captain Tom Rector to hustle himself to the museum with enough help to conduct a thorough search. He phoned the curator, Mr. Kelley, who said he'd be over immediately.

The cops got there first.

Banner said to Captain Rector: "Hold that bird for questioning!" He pointed at Slattery.

Apprehension made Slattery go pale. "W-what for?"

"Material witness," snapped Banner.

Slattery was led out.

All the lights in the museum were turned on and the police went probing into everything.

Mr. Kelley, the curator, arrived. He was a pudgy man with a bald head, a damp handshake, and a businesslike manner.

Banner outlined the situation to him, then added: "I want you to tell us if anything's missing from the museum."

Kelley shook his head doubtfully. "That's a large task. Without a thorough inventory —"

"I know. But this's something worth about a half million. That ought to narrow it down."

"Yes, Senator, it does. We have an original Goya insured for almost that much. Then there's a set of —"

"What's Goya?"

"A painting."

"Nope. No painting or sets. Something that'd fit snug into a gal's handbag."

"I can't imagine," mused Kelley. "Unless it could be the Great Mogul. But that's impossible."

"The Great Mogul?"

"The famous Indian diamond. Weighs 240 carats. It was loaned to us from a private collection.

We're putting on a limited exhibition, starting tomorrow. A responsibility like that is always a headache."

"Look and see if it's still there."

The jewel exhibit room was locked, but Slattery had had the keys, which were now in their possession. Kelley came back to the office and reported that the Great Mogul was still safely locked in its unbreakable glass case.

Kelley then accompanied Captain Rector around the museum to check the most valuable items. This took quite a while longer. But when they came back to Banner at 11:15, Kelley still looked doubtful.

"As far as I can see, Senator, absolutely nothing has been disturbed in this museum."

Banner sat foursquare at a large, ebony-topped desk. He looked bitter. On the desk around him were emptied coffee containers and ashtrays full of cigaret butts. Jim and Evelyn were smoking away. Banner's own dead cigar was gripped in his teeth, gnawed halfway down.

"Dig into your personnel files and get me all you can on Slattery."

"I won't be able to give you that information till morning."

"That's all, Kelley. Go back to bed." He glowered at Captain Rector. "What about Rachel?"

Captain Rector shook his head. "Not a trace of her. We looked

everywhere."

"Keep looking," ordered Banner.

Jim, sitting there with Evelyn on the leather couch, lit a fresh cigaret. He puffed nervously. "Suppose she's not here!" he said in a loud, unsure voice. "Suppose Slattery lied! He's still balking!"

"Yes," said Evelyn with a tired gesture. "He's the only one who claims he saw her."

"We got her hat and coat," Banner started to say. He squinted at the office door. A patrolman was trying to get in.

"What is it, officer?" asked Captain Rector sharply.

"This's my beat, sir," said the bluecoat, saluting respectfully. "I saw all the lights and the police cars. I came in and asked one of the boys what was going on. He said that they were hunting for a missing girl. Well, I saw her."

Banner jumped up. "Going out?"

"No, sir. Going in. I almost ran into her on the sidewalk just outside the gate. She had her head down, keeping the snow out of her face, but I remembered the feather in her hat. She turned in and started for the steps. I called after her. 'It's after hours,' I said. 'The museum's closed.' She kept on going in. 'I work here,' she said over her shoulder. And in she went."

"What time was that?"

"I'd say close to a quarter to nine." He pointed past Banner.

"That's her hat and coat on the hanger, sir."

"Okeh," Said Banner, sitting down again and dismissing the bluecoat. "That corroborates what Slattery told us. Rachel came in. We gotta come to that conclusion. Whatever she was toting back to the museum must've been returned, cuz there's nothing obviously missing now. Rachel stepped outta her hat and coat — and *Pouf!*"

his cigaret from his dry lips. "You've had experience with this sort of thing before, Senator. There must be trick hiding places. Places that the eye looks at and yet slides over without looking at. Something like the purloined letter."

"Whuzzat? Oh, you mean a letter laying out in plain sight is overlooked." Banner made clucking noises. "Nope. I never believed that theory. It's a lotta bunk. If you're hunting for a letter, you'll examine every one you see. As for hidden bodies . . ."

Jim strode across the room, puffing madly. "You found her things in the Egyptian Wing! What about those mummy cases?"

Banner made a sour face. Scrawling with a fat crayon, he was jotting down notes on the back of a large envelope.

"That," he scoffed, "is the first thing anybody thinks about when they come into a museum. That and men in armor and deep jars

and false-bottomed cabinets and big stone sarcophaguses. Nevertheless," he went on, drawing a definite line through some of the scrawls on the envelope. "I've listed that here. The cops looked. No hollow statues either, and she's not concealed in the excelsior in discarded packing cases." He looked up. "Let's assume that nobody wanted to kill her. She was just put outta circulation for a while. What would you do with a live and kicking gal?"

Chilled, Jim stopped pacing. How could Rachel remain hidden so quietly if she were not harmed or dead? He felt queasy. He had to sink down on the couch. Evelyn put a comforting hand on his arm.

Banner was glaring at the crayon marks. "What've you got? She could be doped. She could be drugged with barbituates that would have to keep her helpless for hours and hours. I doubt it. Too much to assume that the criminal carries a loaded hypo needle around waiting for a chance to use it. Too much mellerdrummer." He scratched that off. "Then we have the old chestnut of her being hit over the head and bound and gagged. No sir! This ain't the *Perils of Pauline!*" He glanced at the window. It was still snowing outside. "Whenever there's snow somebody always suggests that the victim's buried in it. Wal, for one thing, this snow ain't deep enough."

Jim's cigaret butt burned his

fingers and he dropped it. There was a place that Banner hadn't mentioned. A place that he didn't want to think about and he didn't dare mention himself. He shuddered.

Banner was rumbling on. "If she's not doped, stunned, bound, gagged, or buried, why don't she get in touch with us? Hah? There're other gimmicks, of course. The victim is somehow bundled aboard a plane or a train that ain't gonna let passengers off for twelve hours. In that way the victim, theoretically, loses contact with everything. Not practical, folks. Again, the victim could have been booked into a jail or hospital, but those're the first places the Missing Persons Bureau checks. If Rachel's in one of 'em, we'll know by morning." He had reached the bottom of the envelope.

Jim stirred restlessly. "What's left?"

Banner tossed the envelope away. "Nothing."

JIM MUST HAVE SLEPT. The bleak December daylight hurt his eyes as he blinked them open. It had stopped snowing.

Then he remembered. Rachel!

He got up from the creaking leather chair, cramped and stiff. He saw Evelyn asleep on the couch, flung there like a rag doll, covered to her chin with her coat.

Banner was still sitting at the desk. Last night he had sent out to a package store for a bottle of Haig

& Haig. It stood dimpling at his elbow. Banner hadn't slept. His nose and the rims of his eyes were a little redder than they had been last night. Stale tobacco smoke hung in the air like a pall.

Jim's voice was a croaking whisper. "Why're we waiting here?"

"For developments," muttered Banner.

The phone on the desk sounded. Banner snatched it up after the first buzz. He listened, then put it down again. "Rachel hasn't been found in any jail, hospital, or morgue. As for Slattery, they ain't got a peep outta him."

There was something Jim had to make sure of, something he had been dreading to face. He steeled himself.

"Be right back," he said. He tramped out of the office, along the ground floor gallery, and out the front door. Near the foot of the broad stone steps the leering snowman still stood.

Jim went slowly up to it, his teeth clenched.

He turned once and looked at the tall, groined windows. He saw the bulky form of Banner in one of them, staring out at him.

Then he lashed out suddenly with his foot, catching the snowman in its round belly. The head toppled off and rolled. The body, under the impetus of the kick, lobbed over and then fell apart. Jim let his breath out.

The snowman was made of

nothing but snow.

"Thank God," breathed Jim. He turned back.

Banner had already vanished from the window.

The museum was beginning to stir to life. Evelyn woke up and said she was hungry and went to the ladies' room to freshen her makeup.

Kelley, the curator, who had gone home for the night, returned. Captain Tom Rector showed up, a little grumpy this morning and not saying much.

Banner sent out for breakfasts for everybody. With paper bags scattered about, crumpled wrappers, spilled coffee, the office was beginning to look like a pigsty.

Kelley glanced at his watch. "The doors will be opened to the public in three-quarters of an hour. Are you going to stop them?"

"Let 'em come," mumbled Banner. "Is the Great Mogul still there?"

"Yes. So are all the other gems."

"That's right," added Captain Rector. "I looked too."

Later, Jim had a good reason to remember that jewel room. Display cases lined the walls. But in the center, exhibited in solitary glory on black velvet, was the Great Mogul. The room had two doors, facing each other, with an armed guard at each door. At the present moment it would seem almost fatuous of Banner to ask if

the Great Mogul was still there.

Banner dealt paper-wrapped sandwiches as if they were playing cards. "I get the hamburger with the bad brèath. Kelley, what've you got on Slattery?"

Kelly began reading personnel data from a file card.

"Skip most of that," interrupted Banner, his mouth full. "Has he had any connection with jewels?"

Kelley adjusted his shell-rimmed eyeglasses. "There's a note here to the effect that Slattery is somewhat of an expert on synthetic gems. During the '30s he was in Bitterfield, Germany, working with the I.G. Farbenindustrie. They were at that time manufacturing emeralds. Slattery has also done lap work."

"No savvy."

"Lapidary. Gem cutting."

Keeping a poker face, Banner turned suddenly to Jim and Evelyn. "So you wanna know how Rachel disappeared on the stairs."

Jim started to say: "I want to know where —"

Banner cut him short. "We know that she was carrying something worth a khan's ransom back to the museum. I follered her from the hotel to make sure she returned it safely. But what happened? As much as I hate to admit it, she caught me tailing her." He was disappointed in himself. "To most people I have a benign look, I'm a father figure, a man you tell

your troubles to. But, on the other hand, I do bear a general resemblance to the Mad Butcher of Braunschweig. So, if she saw me in *that* light, no wonder she got the creeps. Then, on top of that, Jim, you told her that you'd stick with her all night to cheer her up. Cripes! That was the last thing she wanted from you last night. So, to shake both you and me, she pulled the fading act!"

"Voluntarily?" said Jim. "But how?"

"Have you ast yourself why she did something contrary to feminine psychology by taking that compact outta her handbag as she went in through the door to the *dim* stairs? When a woman pulls out a compact, my boy, she wants plenty of light to get to work on her face. Rachel would have to carry it in her hand till she got up to her flat anyhow. She took it out for a definite purpose — and the purpose was to misdirect us. The moment she was at the foot of the stairs, she tossed the compact up to about the eighth step. She didn't *drop* it there at all, but she meant it to look like that."

"You mean she didn't go up the stairs? But I heard her!"

Banner shook his head. "The stairs going up are carpeted. Remember how silently Evelyn went up ahead of us last night? And even I, with my tonnage, came up so quietly that I surprised you at the top. No sir! What you heard

was not Rachel going up — but Rachel going *down*!”

“Zackly! She remained down there long enough for both you and I to be hoaxed up to the first floor landing, then she slipped out into the street again — free!”

“Then she was all right,” shouted Jim. “Didn’t she leave the museum of her free will too?”

Banner looked graver. “No. That’s the work of somebody else.”

Kelley thrust himself forward. “Look here, Senator! What was this something she was carrying back?”

“It was the Great Mogul!”

Kelley was on his feet. “The big diamond is safely in its case in the middle of a guarded room. You say it was carted around in the streets in this irresponsible manner! I say that’s impossible! Robbery is absolutely out of the question!” He was sweating.

Captain Rector rumbled. “What could anybody do with the Great Mogul? It’d be spotted instantly.”

Banner glanced around as if he were entertaining a pack of idiots. “It could be cut into smaller stones, couldn’t it?”

Kelley sat down heavily. “Yes, I suppose it could. But the Great Mogul is as safe as houses.”

“You so sure? Are you willing to submit to an ultraviolet light test?”

Kelley never had a chance to answer.

An ear-splitting roar came from

the heart of the museum. The windowpanes rattled, the floor trembled, men’s voices shouted excitedly in the halls.

“What was that?” cried Kelley, white-faced.

“Bomb!” snapped Captain Rector shortly.

“Yass!” said Banner unhurriedly. “The jewel display, no doubt.”

Kelley clutched his heart and ran out. The others streamed after him.

There was an acrid smell of detonated chemicals in the upper gallery. Several cops were already in the jewel room. Neither of the two guards had been hurt by the explosion. They remained on duty at the doors, letting in only authorized persons. Luckily the museum had not yet opened the doors to the public.

Banner sniffed the air. “Picric acid and potassium chlorate. The homemade kind.”

Only the center display case had been shattered. The bomb had smashed the glass and blown the lock off. Fragments littered the floor. The debris was being winnowed out for the big diamond.

The couldn’t find the Great Mogul!

The guards swore that nobody had entered or left. They had been in plain sight of each other and they alibied each other. They were searched. The stone wasn’t on them. The stone wasn’t on anybody.

Bewildered, Kelley staggered back to the office. He turned wild-eyed to the others. "What am I to believe now? That the glass case was blown open —"

"By a time-bomb," said Banner from the far side of the room.

"That the thief — an *invisible* thief — dashed in, snatched up the Great Mogul from the wreckage, and dashed out again — totally unseen! I'm losing my mind!"

Banner was whistling a dirge through his teeth. "We all had a long night. We're cracking. I suggest we take Evelyn home. How about your police car, Tom?" he asked Captain Rector.

In the babble in the office, Jim could hear Evelyn saying that she could get home all right by herself.

Banner answered: "You're the only gal we got left. We wanna make sure you don't disappear, too."

Waving aside any other discussions, Banner went with Evelyn, Jim, and Captain Rector to the waiting police car.

They didn't say much as they rode to the opposite side of town to where Rachel lived. At the front door of a brownstone Evelyn got out, hurdled a snow pile, and said thanks.

Banner leaned out after her, holding her arm. "Ain't you gonna invite us all up for coffee?"

Evelyn hesitated. She looked done in. Jim thought that Banner was being rude and inconsiderate.

Evelyn finally said: "All right."

Everybody got out of the car and tramped upstairs.

Evelyn put the key in the door. She opened it.

Jim stood on the threshold, halting in surprise. He could smell the aroma of bacon and eggs and coffee!

Banner said brightly: "The coffee's already on. This's another miracle or else —"

Rachel Morgan walked serenely out of the kitchen, wearing a little frilly apron.

Jim flew to her. "Rachel! You're all right?" He felt her arms, her head, and then he kissed her.

"Of course I'm all right, silly," she said. "Why shouldn't I be all right? I was getting worried about you, Evelyn. I've kept breakfast waiting. I knew you'd be starved."

"I think," said Banner, moving in, keeping close to Evelyn, "that she's lost her appetite, Rachel."

Jim spun around to Banner. "Did you know Rachel was here?"

"I had a sneaking suspicion. But I wasn't sure she'd be so chipper. Sit down, everybody." He turned profoundly to Captain Rector. "As the official policeman, it'll be your duty to arrest Evelyn Gunther."

Captain Rector looked a little confused. "What for?"

"For stealing the Great Mogul!"

Captain Rector looked even more confused.

He sank into a chair, but kept a watchful eye on Evelyn all the same. "Go back to the beginning," he said wearily.

"Wal, sir! Slattery, the night guard at the museum, was daffy about Evelyn. She's the expensive kind, squandering all she earned on expensive perfume and Jamaica cruises. She was playing him for a chump, a creep. I say that cuz she was the one who talked him into swiping the Great Mogul. With that in his possession, he'd be rich enough to keep her like a maharani. But the sparkler had to be lifted in a way that would leave both of them in the clear. Once it was in Slattery's hands he'd be able to cut it into smaller diamonds. He was also skilled enough to make a fake Great Mogul outta flint glass. When he was all set for the substitution the night before last, he merely used his keys to get into the jewel room, remove the real diamond from the case and replace it with the glass one. Simple as that. But there was more to come. The next morning Rachel was on the job. She knows something about jewels herself. Somehow she discovered that the diamond in the case was a fake . . ."

Rachel spoke up. "Yes, that's right. I was rearranging it on its black velvet cushion when I noticed that it felt warm. Real diamonds feel cold. I looked at it more closely and could see tiny air bubbles in it. I didn't need an

ultraviolet light to know that it was an imitation. I knew too —"

"Yass," said Banner. "You knew that it was likely that your half-brother, Leonard, had made the switch. He had the opportunity and he had the background for making synthetic stones. So, in order to protect him, you pretended there was nothing amiss, but as soon as you were out of the museum yesterday evening, you ran to Slattery's hotel room to plead with him to go straight. That's what I overheard in the next room. You sold him on honesty, Rachel, and you're to be congratulated. Slattery gave in and handed back the real diamond."

The room was still. Evelyn stared at the carpet pattern on the floor.

Banner continued: "We know how you foxed Jim and me on the stairs. Busting out, you walked the streets with a load on your mind. It was still too early to go back to the museum. So you went to Evelyn's house. You came here. That's not so strange. It's been mentioned that Evelyn was your best friend, outside of Jim. Evelyn was someone you could work with, who'd understand. What you didn't know was that Evelyn was Slattery's gal friend! With a sudden resolve, Rachel, you came here and unburdened yourself to Evelyn. You spilled everything. Yass, and you gave her the diamond!"

Rachel's voice was small. "She said she'd take it back to the museum for me. Truthfully, I was relieved to get it out of my handbag. And Evelyn has always been so helpful."

"Ha! Evelyn knew you had it before you even came in. Naturally Slattery called Evelyn from the hotel to tell her that the big deal was all off and that the stone was being taken back. That must've flattened her. Then you walk in, Rachel, and hand it to her. All Evelyn had to do was hold onto it, leave things as they were, and it'd be hers when the time-bomb went off this morning, blowing the glass diamond to smithereens. But Evelyn had to show evidence of returning it. She told you to sit tight till she got back. Under no circumstances were you to leave these rooms till you heard from her again. You readily agreed to that. On the way out she secretly picked up your hat and coat. She could easily wear your loose coat over her fitted one. She deliberately ran into the policeman outside the museum for identification purposes. Inside, Slattery made a genuine mistake in taking Evelyn for Rachel at a distance in the poor light. Both gals have the same coloring and blonde hair. All Evelyn had to do was drop the hat and coat in the Egyptian Wing and let us think that Rachel had flown again."

Evelyn's eyes darted around the

room behind her canasta glasses. "You can't prove anything! I haven't got the diamond! You can search me!"

"No," admitted Banner. "You ain't got it on you. You're too smart for that. But we got Rachel's story and we'll have Slattery's story. Either you or Slattery made that clockwork bomb that you planted right under the diamond yesterday. Picric acid leaves characteristic stains on the fingers, or at least under the nails. Slattery'll fold up when he knows we got you."

"Where is the Great Mogul?" said Jim. He worried about it for Rachel's sake.

"Any guesses?" asked Banner, looking around. Evelyn wouldn't've ditched it on her way to the museum last night. She had it when we arrived, but she had to get rid of it. She didn't hide it inside the museum, cuz the interior was being too thoroughly searched. I'd say that when she went to the ladies' room she tossed it out one of the windows into the grounds. It fell into the snow."

"Which window?" cried Captain Rector.

"She ain't talking," grinned Banner. "I dunno. That's for you to find out. You'll have to melt all the snow around the museum windows in buckets. That's a job for fellas who can bend over their stummicks." He patted his girth. "So that lets me out."

THE TUESDAY MURDERS

Why Were All the Victims Killed on the Same
Day of the Week? When the Detectives Learned
That, They'd Know the Killer!

by GARY BRANDNER

THE SEA WAS UNEASY on the night of February 6. The surf boomed and crashed among the pilings of the Beach City peir. Ritchie Greer swore drunkenly at the sea as a wave swept up on the sand and splashed across his shoes. He was thirty-four years old and going bald, but he would never be called anything but Ritchie. Richard would have been too formal for a seventh-grade dropout with no skills or talents, and Dick had too straight a sound

for a man of Ritchie's background, a man who had just completed a richly deserved prison term.

He stumbled on the beach, and whirled angrily, ready to curse at whatever had tripped him up. When he found nothing but the smooth, wet sand, it seemed to Ritchie to be just one more of an endless string of irritations. Tomorrow it would be a whole week that he'd been back in Beach City, and not one damn thing had gone right.

Five years had made a lot of difference. He didn't know anybody any more. The guys he had hung around with were all gone — in the joint, tripped out on dope, or dead. He was supposed to try to find a job, but he hadn't even bothered to look. Nobody would hire an ex-con. All his life Ritchie had got the dirty end of the stick, and he didn't look for it to change now.

Tonight when he'd run out of money down at the Starfish Club, he couldn't even borrow a few lousy bucks from the creeps in there. So here he was at eleven o'clock with nothing to do but go back to his lousy room. Ritchie knew he would have to make a score soon.

What he needed was a gun. Then he could score a liquor store or one of those little all-night markets. To get money for a gun, he'd have to roll some creep. Ritchie didn't like strong-arming. Sometimes, no matter how old and feeble the creep looked, he'd fight back. And you never knew but what they'd only be carrying a couple of bucks. But it looked like that was what he'd have to do.

"Ritchie Greer."

The voice spoke to him from out of the darkness under the pier. Ritchie pulled up short and squinted into the gloom.

"Who's there?"

"What day is this, Ritchie?"

He strained his eyes, leaning forward to see who was talking to him. All he could make out was a blurred outline, darker than the surrounding shadows.

"What day is this?" the voice repeated.

In Ritchie's mind the idea took shape that this might be an easy score. There was nobody around to hear anything. He walked slowly toward the voice, his hands ready.

"It's Tuesday." Ritchie tried to keep his voice calm so as not to alarm the guy before he got close enough to hit him. *"Tuesday,"* he repeated, reaching out for the figure in the shadows.

It was the last word Ritchie Greer was ever to speak. His head exploded in white-hot flash of pain, and then there was nothing at all.

LT. PETER BLANEY sat at his desk in the Beach City Municipal Building, cleaning his fingernails with the point of a sword-shaped letter opener. Blaney was a square-shouldered man with the hard, suspicious eyes of a long-time cop. Across from him sat Sgt. Ace Tamasaki, in a muted-plaid sport coat and pale gray slacks.

"Has anybody showed up to claim the body?" Blaney asked.

"Not yet. Ritchie Greer has no close relatives, and if he has any friends in town, they're keeping it a secret."

Blaney picked up several

sheets of paper stapled together. "Judging from his rap sheet, Ritchie Greer was not a friendly sort. 'Malicious mischief, statutory rape, burglary, assault with a deadly weapon, armed robbery.' Right up the ladder. The next one was bound to be a homicide."

"And so it was," Tamasaki observed, "but with him as the victim. Anything interesting in the lab report?"

Blaney located another paper. "Shot between the eyes with a .45 caliber bullet. Death was instantaneous. Needless to say."

"Robbery, you think?"

"It doesn't look like it. Ritchie was carrying only sixty cents in change, but his empty wallet was still buttoned into a hip pocket."

"What about the cartridge we found at the scene?"

"That looks good. It's a Winchester W45A1P with the ejector markings of a Colt Government Model .45 automatic. There was no salt water corrosion of the metal, so it had to be dropped last night. It's almost certainly from the gun that did Ritchie."

Tamasaki glanced at his watch. "I've got to get over to the courthouse. I'm testifying today, and I'd better not be late. It's Judge Demaree, and you know how he is about the rules."

"I'll walk out with you," Blaney said. He pulled on his coat, and the two policemen went out of the office and down the steps of the Municipal Building. Tamasaki

continued across the street to the courthouse. Blaney stopped at the catering truck parked at the curb. He pulled a styrofoam cup from a dispenser and poured hot coffee from an urn at the rear of the truck.

"How about a nice hot roll to go with that?" said the driver when Blaney handed him a quarter. He was a smiling man with a full gray beard and intense blue eyes.

"I don't know if I've got time, Bill," Blaney said.

"It won't take any time at all," said the driver. "I saved one of the kind you like, with the cinnamon and apple. It's all hot and ready for you. Anyway, I'll bet you skipped breakfast again today."

Blaney laughed and accepted the hot sweet roll on a paper plate. He spread a pat of butter on the roll and let it melt. "Bill, nobody has nagged me about eating the way you do since my ex-wife. In the two years you've been parking this food-wagon out front, I bet I've put on ten pounds."

"You can use it," said Bill seriously. "You ought to get married again, Lieutenant. A man should have a family."

"I'll think about it," Blaney answered noncommittally. He finished the roll and coffee, and went on out to his car in the police parking lot.

THE STARFISH CLUB was a dingy bar on the one section of ocean front in the city that had not

yet been developed into beaches or marinas. The Starfish was not one of the cutesy cocktail lounges for tourists that were tricked up with fishnet and glass floats, nor was it one of the cliquish places for the local in-crowd. Only the sound of the surf, which could be heard when the jukebox and pinballs were silent, made the Starfish different from any seedy bar in any city in the country.

Lt. Blaney walked in at 10 A.M., just as the place opened for business. He ignored a pair of bleary-eyed morning customers and crossed the gritty floor to where the bartender, a sallow man named Veters, watched him sourly. Blaney produced his identification.

"The cops were in here last night," Veters said. "I told 'em everything I know."

"I'm sure you did, Mr. Veters," Blaney said smoothly. "But you won't mind telling it again." He went on without waiting for a response. "How long was Ritchie Greer in here last night before he left?"

The bartender sighed with exaggerated patience. "Like I already told every cop in the county, Ritchie came in about five o'clock and he left about ten. Give or take a half hour either way."

"Did anybody leave with him? Or just after him?"

"No. They was only half a dozen guys in here last night. Tuesday is a slow night. They was all still

here when the cops come in around midnight and start askin' questions about Ritchie."

"Did you see if Ritchie met anybody outside when he left here?"

"What do you think, I'm going to hold his hand all the way home? A guy walks out of my club, he's no more concern of mine."

"How often was he in here during the past week?" -

"Every night. No law against that, is there?"

"No law that I'm worried about," Blaney said. "Do you know if he walked along the beach every night when he left here?"

Veters hesitated for a moment, then shrugged when he apparently decided that this piece of information could not be used against him.

"Yeah, I think so. He used to walk down the beach to Opal Street on the other side of the pier, then up the hill to his rooming house."

"Thank you, Mr. Veters," Blaney said. "The city appreciates your cooperation."

The bartender scowled at his back as Blaney walked out of the bar.

The beach began a block away from the street where the Starfish was. In February it was chill and damp and usually empty except for an occasional hardy surfer in a wet suit. In the summer the sand would be covered with tourists drinking wine from paper cups and throwing Frisbees while they scorched their flesh trying to

acquire a California tan in a week.

Lt. Blaney plodded along the edge of the wave line where Ritchie Greer had probably walked the night before. There were, of course, no footprints this morning. Half a mile down the beach was the old wooden pier. There several curious citizens prowled the sand, looking for traces of last night's violence.

The thick pilings under the pier would give excellent concealment, Blaney saw. And last night there had been a heavy surf that would muffle even the boom of a .45.

The citizens moved back as Blaney approached, apparently recognizing authority in his purposeful stride. He stopped at approximately the spot where Ritchie Greer had stood when somebody blew part of his head away. The washed sand held no signs of sudden death this morning. The finding of the body so soon after the crime by a couple of school kids drinking on the beach had been lucky. Another hour and both Ritchie's body and the important cartridge case would have been swept out to sea. Blaney stared out over the gray waves for several minutes, then turned and walked away.

ON THE NIGHT of February 13, Lyle Ortmann was tired but feeling quite pleased with himself as he turned the Mercedes into his street on the fashionable north side of Beach City. He was pleased specifically with his evening's re-

search in the musty records down at the courthouse; and he was pleased in general with his standing as Beach City's top corporate lawyer and the good life it had brought him. There was a time, when he was an idealistic young attorney in the public defender's office, when Lyle Ortmann saw himself as a champion of human rights, caring nothing for fees, taking his reward from every legal victory over The System. He might actually have achieved that kind of success as a criminal lawyer, but it would not have bought him this fine house or expensive car, and it would not have put his two children in the exclusive private school his wife had chosen.

Ortmann parked in the driveway and stepped out of the car. The sky was clear, and he was too tired to bother putting the car away in the garage. It would be safe. In this neighborhood there was no crime.

"Lyle Ortmann."

Startled by the sound of his name, Ortmann whirled to face the shrubbery where the voice came from.

"Who's there? What do you want?"

"What day is this, Ortmann?"

"I don't understand."

"What day is this?" the voice repeated. The menacing tone made Lyle Ortmann shiver.

"It . . . it's the 13th of February . . . Tuesday."

He saw the black metal object thrust from the shadows into his

face. At the same instant he perceived it as a gun, the world exploded.

AN HOUR LATER the quiet street had a garish, carnival look under the police floodlights and with the reflections of the rotating red and blue lamps atop the two patrol cars parked in front of Lyle Ortmann's house.

Lt. Blaney stood spread-legged, frowning down into the bloody remains of Ortmann's face. An area all around the body had been roped off by the patrolmen who answered the initial call. Beyond the barriers the white faces of Ortmann's neighbors peered at the scene. They spoke in hushed, frightened voices.

Sgt. Tamasaki came across the street, stepped over the rope, and walked up the driveway to join Blaney.

"Did you do any good with witnesses?" the lieutenant asked.

"A lot of people heard the shot," Tamasaki said, "but as usual, most of them thought it was a backfire and didn't pay any attention."

"Most of them?"

"Right. Two people recognized it as a gunshot, or thought they did, and looked out their windows. One didn't see anything, the other thinks she saw a van, 'hippie-type,' she says, driving away fast."

"She *thinks* she saw it?" Blaney said.

"That's it. She couldn't be positive. The street has only dim lights at the intersection, and the van, if there was a van, drove off with no headlights."

"Okay, it's better than nothing. Get statements from everybody who saw or heard anything at all."

Tamasaki nodded and moved off to talk to the uniformed patrolmen. Blaney knelt by the body. Ortmann's wallet was clearly visible in his hip pocket. From where Blaney was, the edges of a sheaf of bills could be seen. He stood up with a sigh.

The lieutenant moved carefully along the driveway, coming to a stop when a tiny gleam of light from the ground over by a tall shrub caught his eye. Blaney walked over and dropped to his knees. He reached out with a ballpoint pen to probe at the object that had reflected the light. When he nudged it free from the clump of grass where it had fallen, Blaney nodded in grim satisfaction. A .45-caliber Winchester cartridge case.

SIX DAYS LATER Lt. Blaney sat in his office glowering at the clutter of notes, reports, forms and photographs that lay spread across his desk. Ace Tamasaki strolled in through the door and dropped into a chair across from the lieutenant.

"I've just checked out the last of the 'hippie-type' vans registered in the city," said Tamasaki. "This

one belongs to a 71-year-old retired school teacher. She has what Kojak would call an ironclad alibi."

"Kojak talks much hipper than that," Blaney said without looking up.

"Anyway, we're out of vans without turning up a single live suspect."

"The van could have been from out of our area," Blaney said. "The country is full of them. If we had turned a suspect it would have been pure luck."

"I'd rather be lucky than good," Tamasaki quoted. "Did you get the final report from ballistics?"

"Yes, and there were no surprises. The gun that killed Lyle Ortmann was the same one that killed Ritchie Greer. It was the same kind of a shot, straight into the face. Same day of the week. After that we run out of sames. We've got one bad apple — a lifetime loser fresh out of San Quentin with sixty cents in his pants and not even a friend to claim his body. We've also got a respected attorney with a six-figure income, a wife with society connections, a home in the north end, and two kids who are straighter than the Mouseketeers. Two very different men shot down a week apart, apparently by the same killer. What do you suppose Kojak would do?"

"Break for a commercial."

Sgt. Tamasaki was thoughtful for a moment, then he said, "Wasn't Ortmann with the public defender's office at one time?"

"That occurred to me," Blaney said. "I went across the street and checked the court records of every case Ortmann tried during the period of 1963 to 1966 when he was with the public defender. Ritchie Greer was not one of his clients."

"That's too bad," said Tamasaki, "in a way."

"Yes, it would have given us a connection between the two victims. A starting point for finding the killer."

"You don't think Ritchie and Ortmann were just chosen at random?"

Blaney looked up from his papers into the dark, Oriental face of his sergeant. "Do you?"

Tamasaki took only a moment to consider, then shook his head decisively. "No."

"There's something tugging at my mind about this case," Blaney said. "Something right here in the reports and evidence that tickles my memory. If I could just get hold of whatever it is and bring it to the surface . . ."

"Better bring it up in a hurry, Lieutenant, you know what tomorrow is."

Blaney nodded his head gravely. "I know . . . Tuesday."

IT CAME TO HIM at four o'clock in the morning. Blaney's night had

been a restless one of intermittent sleep, fragments of dreams, and endless replays of the week's investigation. Finally, it was the conversation he'd had with Tamasaki that brought the elusive memory up where he could grab it. The key was Tuesday.

By five A.M. Blaney had routed the courthouse clerk out of bed, and was leafing through the records of criminal cases from thirteen and fourteen years ago. It did not take long to find what he was after — the rape murder of a sixteen-year-old Wisconsin girl named Theresa Morgan. The girl's parents had a pet name for her — Tuesday. The crime was committed on July 6, 1965 — Tuesday. The local newspaper quickly started calling it the Tuesday Murder.

At the time, Blaney had just made sergeant in the homicide division of the Beach City Police. His memory of the details was fuzzy, but quickly came into focus as he read over the records.

The girl had gone down to the beach alone that night, one hundred yards from her parents' motel. People who heard her cries a few minutes later thought it was someone playing in the surf. When she was found two hours later raped and strangled, her body bore traces of semen, hairs, bits of flesh under the nails, and a torn piece of a shirt, all judged to have come from her attacker. This hard physical evidence, matched

against known sex offenders, led to the quick arrest of Joe Clyde Heinke, an unemployed twenty-year-old resident of Beach City. Most damning of all was the testimony of an eyewitness who told police he saw Heinke running from the beach where the girl was killed.

Armed with what he thought was a powerful case, the district attorney went to court, only to have it blow up in his face when the eyewitness got on the stand and recanted his identification of Heinke. The defense moved for dismissal of the charges; Judge John Demaree granted the motion. Afterward there were rumors of collusion between the attorney for the defense and the side-switching witness. Nothing was ever proved.

The attorney appointed for Joe Clyde Heinke from the public defender's office was Lyle Ortmann. The witness who changed his story was Ritchie Greer. Blaney remembered now the eventual fate of Joe Clyde Heinke. Two years after beating the rape-murder charge he was convicted of armed robbery and sentenced to Folsom prison. He was there less than a month before being stabbed to death by a fellow inmate in a fight over a pack of cigarettes.

Lt. Blaney left the courthouse and crossed the street to the Municipal Building and his own office. He telephoned Ace Tama-

saki at home and asked if the sergeant would mind coming in early. The sergeant responded that he would definitely mind, but he would be there in twenty minutes.

Precisely twenty-two minutes later Tamasaki, shaved, groomed, and carefully dressed as always, walked into Blaney's office.

"What kept you?" growled the lieutenant.

"The lights were all against me. What have you got, Pete?"

Blaney sketched in the details of the fourteen-year-old murder case that provided the connection between Ritchie Greer and Lyle Ortmann. He handed Tamasaki a yellowed newspaper photo of a well-dressed couple in their forties taken on the steps of the courthouse. The woman was thin and frail. She appeared to be crying. The man was stocky and blond, with a wild look in his pale eyes.

"The girl's parents," Blaney explained, "W. Everett Morgan and his wife Isobel. The picture was taken fourteen years ago, right after charges against Heinke were dismissed."

Tamasaki studied the faces in the picture. "Are you saying one or both of these people is here in Beach City now killing off the people who helped free Heinke?"

"I'm saying it's a strong possibility. The father had a mental breakdown right after the trial ended. You can almost see it in his face in the picture. His wife

took him back to Appleton, Wisconsin, and that's the last we heard of them. I want you to get on the phone, start from Appleton, and find out exactly where these two people are today."

It was afternoon before Sgt. Tamasaki had finished all the telephoning it took to trace down Mr. and Mrs. W. Everett Morgan. When he came into Blaney's office he was not smiling.

"Let's have the bad news," Blaney said.

"First of all, the father flipped out completely when the Morgans got back home. The wife took care of him as long as she could, but in April of 1965 he started to have violent spells and she couldn't handle him. He was committed to a state mental hospital. Two years later Mrs. Morgan died of cancer."

Blaney slumped in his chair. "So there go our suspects — one of them's locked up, the other one's dead."

"Not exactly," Tamasaki continued. "Two years ago Morgan was released from the hospital. I talked to the chief psychiatrist there, and he said it was not so much Morgan being cured as a cutback in state funds that forced him to release patients who were still potentially dangerous."

"That sounds familiar," Blaney commented. "What then?"

"Morgan's first address when he left the hospital was a hotel in Milwaukee. He checked out of

there in less than a week, left no forwarding address, and disappeared."

For a moment Blaney rubbed his jaw thoughtfully, then he tapped the old newspaper photo of Morgan. "That's our man, Ace. I feel it. Get copies of this picture blown up — just the man's face — and pass them out to the usual people."

"Do you think he still looks like that?" Tamasaki asked. "A man can change a lot in thirteen years."

"Who knows?" said Blaney. "For now it's all we've got."

By Tuesday evening pictures of W. Everett Morgan had been distributed to police patrolmen, mail carriers, meter readers, and telephone installers. Nobody recognized the face. The picture was shown to everyone who was in the Starfish Club the night Ritchie Greer was killed, and everybody who lived on the short suburban street where Lyle Ortmann was shot down. Again, nothing.

The day had been heavily overcast, and by seven o'clock it was completely dark outside Blaney's office. Inside, the lieutenant kept reading and rereading the slim file of material he had collected on what were now, inevitably, being called the Tuesday murders.

"You say you checked all the hotels and motels?" Blaney asked Tamasaki.

"They've all been checked," the sergeant confirmed. "There

are two Morgans registered — a 29-year-old real-estate man from Seattle and a stewardess for Trans-Pacific Airlines. No desk clerks or employees recognized the newspaper photo of Morgan."

"Damn," Blaney muttered. "He's here somewhere. I'd bet my pension it's him."

"Maybe he's all through killing people," said Tamasaki, "now that he's nailed the lawyer who defended his daughter's killer and the witness who helped get him off."

"Maybe," Blaney said doubtfully. He stood up and walked to the window that overlooked the street. Suddenly his body stiffened. He whirled and ran for the door.

"Let's go, Ace," he shouted over his shoulder.

Sgt. Tamasaki followed without asking questions.

The two policemen pounded down the steps of the Municipal Building, out the door, and across the street past the parked catering truck. Blaney charged up the steps of the courthouse with Tamasaki close behind.

SUPERIOR COURT JUDGE John Demaree sat bent over the desk in his chambers. A vigorous man of sixty-five, he was working late to prepare the instructions he would deliver to the jury tomorrow. Judge Demaree always made it a point to explain the law in lucid detail to his juries.

So engrossed was the judge in his work that he did not see the man push open the door to his chambers and silently cross the carpeted floor to the desk. A hand shot out and grasped the desk lamp, twisting it so the light hit Judge Demaree in the eyes.

"What is this?" he demanded, and started to rise. Then he saw the gun — a .45-caliber automatic.

"What day is this, Judge Demaree?"

With the light still shining in his eyes, the judge could make out only the outlines of the man standing across the desk from him.

"Who are you?"

"What day is this?" the man with the gun repeated. The weapon moved up, level with the judge's head.

Suddenly someone else was in the room. A quiet voice spoke from the doorway behind the intruder.

"Drop it, Bill," said Lt. Blaney.

The man with the gun turned in confusion. The pistol wavered in his hand. Sgt. Tamasaki crossed the room in three quick steps and seized the man's wrist. Although Tamasaki seemed to grasp the wrist only lightly, the other man's fingers went instantly limp, and the gun thumped to the floor.

The judge stood up and walked around his desk. He stood there for a moment with the two policemen, looking into the bearded face of Bill, the catering truck driver.

It was Bill himself who broke the silence. "I didn't think you'd

figure it out this soon, Lieutenant," he said. "Not until I killed the judge. By then you would have put it together, but it wouldn't matter. I'd have done what I came here two years ago to do."

"Why did you wait two years, Bill?" Blaney asked softly.

"I had to wait for Greer to get out of prison. My first idea was to kill Heinke. When I found out he was dead, I decided to get the men who set him free after he killed my little girl. I bought the catering truck and set it up outside the courthouse where I could watch the lawyer and the judge while I waited for the lying witness. I would kill each of them on a Tuesday, one week apart, and when I finished, people would remember, and the score would be settled at last." He looked with vague sadness at Judge Demaree, who was standing by the window, staring at him. "I almost made it, too."

THE NEXT DAY Lt. Blaney and Sgt. Tamasaki sat in Blaney's office drinking bitter coffee out of plastic cups. The coffee came from a machine out in the hall. Bill's catering truck was gone for good.

"You cut that one a little close, Lieutenant," said Tamasaki.

"I was slow in putting things together," Blaney admitted. "Once I was sure Morgan was the killer, I should have known the judge who'd dismissed the charges would be on his list. Last night

when I looked out across the street and saw a light in Demaree's office, and saw the catering truck downstairs after working hours, it all hit me at once. I knew we'd have to hustle to be in time to save the judge."

"Okay, I see how you connected Judge Demaree with the other victims, but what tipped you that Bill the caterer was W. Everett Morgan?"

"First of all, Bill's been here just two years, the same length of time that Morgan has been unaccounted for. Then last night, seeing the truck with its sides folded down I could see how it could be mistaken for a van. And

I'll bet that when we check Morgan's first initial it stands for William. Bill."

Tamasaki shook his head sadly. "In a way I can feel sorry for the guy. After thirteen years he was still trying to avenge his daughter. What do you think will happen to him?"

"My guess is that he'll go back to the hospital," Blaney said. "This time for good. We'll know on the twenty-second, that's when his hearing is scheduled."

Sgt. Tamasaki glanced at the wall calendar. "I suppose you know what day that is."

"I noticed," said Blaney, looking out the window. "Tuesday."

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The Fourth Homer

What's More Important, A Nagging Wife or a Good Baseball Game? Kirby Answered that Question by Smashing Hilda's Skull — and then Going Down to Barney's Bar to Watch the Big Game on Television!

by MICHAEL AVALLONE

HILDA SCREAMED just once, a high-rising, soul-filling shriek of desperation, just before Irwin brought the brass bookend down on her skull. Respect at last, he thought with satisfaction, and stood back, panting, her shriek still echoing in his head. Even as her limp body hit the floor, the radio on the dresser blared. The first inning of a New York Yankees-Cleveland Indians game at the Stadium had been brought to life by a Wally Savage homerun. As Irwin carefully prepared the bedroom to deceive the police who were sure to come, the announcer's crisp voice crackled in the tiny room. "*...and here he comes, Mr. Savage himself, toeing home plate as he comes in for his fifteenth homer of the year. It's been a fine season for Wally, so far...*"

Irwin worked quickly. It had taken a long time to decide to kill

Hilda. Ten years, really. But now the thing was done, a great relief flooded him. All he had to do was make the scene look as if his wife had walked in on a burglar ransacking the bedroom. As for himself, why, he would be in Barney's bar having his usual beer before going home from the office. Drinking and watching the Yankee game. Didn't the whole building know his TV set was on the fritz? It would make a lot of sense that he would stop in Barney's to catch a brew and a couple of innings.

Hilda's death scream still filled his ears.

But he would never have to hear her nagging voice again. Not ever.⁹ The awful complaints about bills, arthritis, his lousy job — his almost religious devotion to Baseball with a capital B.

He could still hear her, the scream ever-present in the background. "*Grown man like*

you! All those stupid magazines and baseball junk! Saving clippings out of the papers like you was some teenage jerk! Irwin — you're supposed to be a grown man; if you had any sense you'd remember you're not a kid anymore. Then maybe you'd amount to something!"

Carefully, silently, he left the bedroom, walked through the living room and slipped out the front door. Nobody had seen him double back after he left for the job. Even Hilda, when she had charged in to see who had turned the radio in the bedroom on full volume, had been surprised to see him still in the apartment.

AT THREE-THIRTY that day, Barney's was jammed, probably because it was a holiday. Heat hung in the air and patrons stood shoulder to shoulder at the bar, craning their heads toward the large TV set above the cash register. Barney was hunched below it, a patient, aggressive monument to the social custom of Eat, Drink and Be Merry. The 21-inch screen bristled with activity.

"Here comes Savage again," someone commented.

"He'll connect again. He eats this guy alive."

"What's the score?" someone else asked. A newcomer, obviously.

"Three to one," someone answered. "Savage homered in the first with two on."

Just as Irwin entered the bar, the crowd erupted with noise. "There she goes! Two in a row!"

"That Savage," marveled another voice. Irwin pushed to the bar, eager to become a part of the scene, anxious to remove himself from the almost dreamlike quality of the murder he had just committed. Up on the screen runners were churning around the bases. He spied Wally Savage, trotting complacently down the third-base line and stepping on home plate. The announcer's voice was fairly chortling with unbecoming partisanship.

"Well, if you just tuned us in, it's been a red letter day for the man from Jennings, Kentucky. Twice he's faced the sidearm offerings of Lefty Parkhurst and that's just how many times he's deposited the old apple among the cash customers in the left center field seats. It's five-one Yankees, and all the runs are earned, and all the runs belong to one Wally Savage. Listen to the crowd!"

Irwin listened, trying to think. He ordered a beer and tried to look unconcerned. The big clock over the glass-mirrored rear of the bar said three-thirty-five. He started to ask the man next to him a question and then was saved the trouble when somebody else asked it.

"What inning?"

"Bottom of the third."

Stupid! Irwin thought to himself. *You almost asked that*

question. You were supposed to be here long enough to know what inning it was! He composed himself, forcing himself to drink his beer slowly. Yes, he would wait about an hour, then saunter back up to the third floor apartment. That would give him plenty of time to react properly to the discovery of Hilda's corpse. Even now, it seemed like something that never happened.

The bar continued to fill. More customers streamed in. Loud voices discussed the game. Irwin lost himself in the clamor, keeping his eyes glued on the screen. Even as a murderer he was too much of a baseball diehard to be indifferent to the records. The accomplishments. He even became interested in a heavy bet that took place at his side in the fifth inning.

"Ho, ho, ho. Here comes a third one, Eddie."

"Be yourself. There's a new pitcher now and Savage ain't gonna even see another good pitch. They'll walk him."

"Says who? There's two on and two out. Why risk it? I say they'll pitch to him and he'll hit another homer."

"You're dreamin'."

"I'm dreamin'? What odds?"

"You serious? You know how tough it is to hit three big ones in a game, let alone in a row? I got two bucks to your one says he can't do it."

"Man, you're generous, ain't

you? Well, I'll take it. You just watch."

Irwin did, along with everyone else in Barney's. The private bet had been voiced just loud enough for everyone to take sides and hold opinions. More than one habitue' of Barney's seemed convinced that Eddie's friend had made a sucker bet. Why, some of the best hitters in the history of the game never hit three in one day, playing in thousands of ballgames. It was a real feat.

The TV cameras focussed on Savage's broad back, with the big number 5 showing. He took a ball, then a strike, and then swung. There was a loud crack and Barney's bar exploded with awe and loud cries of pleasure, signalling homage to a champion.

Eddie's friend whooped. "Pay me! That one's even longer than the other two!"

It was. The ball carried into the center field bleachers beyond the Yankee bullpen. The announcer said so and the cameras showed the exact spot where the ball had come down.

Irwin finished his slow beer, mopped his brow and drew away from the bar. A fine sheen of perspiration damped his forehead; he wiped his face on his jacket sleeve. Even as he left the bar there was heavy excitement about the possibility of another Savage home run. The Yankees were swinging with great results, and

he was sure to get another turn at bat around the seventh or eighth inning.

It took Irwin twenty minutes to get home. Another two or three to mount the badly lighted stairway outside the apartment. He didn't knock or call out. As was his normal custom returning home, he pushed into the apartment.

He would discover the body, be dazed, call the police and then wait for them to come. He had his story all ready. He had gone down to the office, yes, he knew it was a holiday but he wanted to catch up on some paperwork. He had knocked off early, stopped in Barney's, lingered a while because of the ballgame. He thought about it and liked it; it would be fine. He had been excited about the Savage home runs and had hung around to see what would happen. It all added up.

He had to stop on the threshold of the apartment. There were two men in the place he called home. He saw topcoats, fedoras, quiet grim faces and an air of expectancy. He didn't have to ask. He knew who they were. Policemen, like ballplayers, had a look all their own.

"Who are you?" he demanded, for the sake of appearances. "What are you doing here?"

"You Mr. Kirby?"

"Of course I am. Where's Hilda — ?"

"Easy, Mr. Kirby. You're too

late. Your wife is in the bedroom. Dead. One of the neighbors came by to borrow something. Mrs. Farley. Got no answer when she knocked, but she could hear the radio — "

The other policeman chimed in. "Yeah. The radio. It was playing pretty loud and the door wasn't locked, so your neighbor just walked in. You'd better sit down. Get him a chair, Jerry."

Irwin sat down, blindly. Knowing that his behavior was exactly what it should be. Dazed. Stunned. Unable to think properly. He was hardly aware of the two detectives, wasn't even sure which one was doing the talking. Suddenly, a steady crackle of voices from the bedroom. Why — *the radio was on . . .*

He could tell because Savage was up at bat again. The announcer was blaring the details of the three successive four-base hits with all the trimmings. Telling the names of men who had hit four —

Delahanty, Gehrig, Klein, Mays —

Odd that the detectives hadn't seen fit to turn the damn thing off. Considering there was a murdered woman on the premises.

" . . . *Savage takes a called first strike. Listen to the crowd! They didn't like that call . . .*"

"My wife," Irwin suddenly said, starting to rise.

"Easy, Mr. Kirby. There's

nothing you can do."

"What — what happened — ?"

"Looks like she walked in on somebody and he hit her with one of those brass bookends in the bedroom. She died instantly, I'd say. In a minute or two we want you to look in there and give us your ideas."

"I'll do anything I can . . ."

The unseen radio quivered with sound. "*. . . Strike two! Swinging! Savage went down on one knee on that one! I'd say he wants that fourth homer, wouldn't you, fans? Even the Babe never hit four in one game . . .*"

Irwin's head was reeling. The blood of the blow, the look in Hilda's eyes when she knew, in that last second, that he was going to kill her. Barney's bar. The smoke, the noise, the ballgame. Still, it all fit. It gave him the perfect appearance of a distraught husband who comes home to find his wife brutally murdered.

"Mr. Kirby?" One of the detectives was addressing him.

"I'm sorry — yes?"

"Mrs. Farley seemed surprised your wife was listening to the ballgame. Says she hated the game. Only used the radio for some music, or to listen to some of the soap-opera programs. That so?"

"I — I —"

"*. . . here comes the pitch! Savage swings —*" A mighty roar filled the apartment. Crowd noises bursting from that damned radio. Irwin found himself strain-

ing to hear. To hear if Savage —

"Well, now," the detective went on. "It doesn't seem logical that a burglar would play a radio loud in an apartment where he was working. Does it? Mr. Kirby, do you hear me?"

"*. . . STRIKE THREE! Savage goes down swinging! Well, nobody can say he didn't try. What a cut — !*"

Irwin felt the disappointment fall like lead in his stomach. Savage had struck out. It would have been great if he had made it. Just as it would have been great if he'd have remembered to turn off that goddamn radio. How could he have forgotten? He had turned up the volume knowing her hatred of baseball would bring Hilda running, ready to nag, ready to shrill the old refrain. *You and that goddamn baseball — !*

"You're a bit of a baseball fan yourself, Mr. Kirby? All those magazines and books and gloves and bats and those autographed balls in the closet in the bedroom. Now, who do you suppose would be listening to the game on the radio, Mr. Kirby? With the volume loud enough to drown out a scream — ?"

Irwin Kirby shook his head.

Funny about the radio. Funny about Hilda's nagging voice, and that last scream of hers.

Long after she had screamed there hadn't been another sound in the world.

Five Easy Lessons

He Was Taking the Kid Out on His First Job and
Teaching Him the Ropes. Trouble Was, the Kid
Had an Idea of His Own — One That Involved
Murder!

by JAMES M. REASONER

"NEVER DRAW ATTENTION to yourself," I said. Bobby nodded. I went on, "Did you notice the way I checked over everything on the car before we left? It's almost as thorough as when the state inspects it every year. Check all your lights to be sure they're working, even the little one over the license plate. Make sure your muffler's not too noisy. A cop will stop you for that, too. Being stopped by a cop can ruin everything, coming or going. If you're on your way to a job, he can delay you and throw off your timetable. If you've already pulled it, he can spot the goods. Needless to say, you never ever break the speed limit or run a red light."

"If it was needless to say, then why did you say it?" cracked Bobby. He was grinning that arrogant grin again, as if he knew all the answers before he even knew what the questions were.

He went on, "Just looking out for your little chick, mama hen?"

I could see where he would feel like that, since I was older and in a position of responsibility. Bobby had always been one to resent authority, ever since I had known him. I explained as patiently as I could, "This is your first real job, and I don't want anything to go wrong." A little subtle flattery might not hurt. "We don't want a promising career cut off before it has a chance to develop."

He nodded. "I can see the sense in that. How much do you think we'll get tonight?"

"I'm not sure. The guy is a doctor, so he should be good for plenty. We'll get however much we can in the time we have."

I brought the car to a smooth stop at a red light, avoiding squealing the tires. Bobby had wanted to drive, but I had convinced him otherwise, seeing as

how it was his first real job. The muggings didn't count, at least not with me.

"I still don't understand why we have to be in and out in three minutes," he was saying.

"Because five minutes is a good safe estimate of how much time it will take the closest cops to get there after the alarm goes off."

"I wish we didn't have to worry about the damn alarm."

"So do I, but I'm not an electrician. I'm a burglar." The light changed to green and I pulled away, accelerating gradually. "Alarms are just something we have to live with these days. That's why you can't ever be greedy. Keep an eye on your time, and when it's up, get out. I've seen guys get carried away and not be satisfied with a good haul. They're after a *great* haul, and they hang around too long trying to load up more stuff. Before they know it, boom! The cops've got them, and all they get out of it is some time inside. That's dumb, Bobby."

"Yeah, yeah. Whatever you say, Alex." He was looking out the window, watching the lights of the city at night slide by. What I was saying was going in one ear and out the other. I sighed. You try to teach the kid a few things for his own good, and he acts like you're boring him to death. I couldn't understand his attitude. On my first job, I had

been as tense and jumpy as a cat. I would have welcomed somebody trying to help me out. That just wasn't Bobby's style, though, and never had been. He had all the self-assurance in the world.

But I wasn't ready to give up on him yet, not after all the time I had spent working with him. I tried to prompt some interest on his part by saying, "Do you know why we're hitting this particular house tonight?"

He snorted. "Because a rich doctor lives there. Why else?"

"Because a rich doctor lives there and the house is behind a lot of trees and shrubs, that's why. Poor visibility from the street. And because the doctor and his wife are the guests of honor at a big society party tonight. I got that from reading the society pages in the newspaper, which you of course thought was hilarious. And because it's at the end of the street and it'll take longer for the cops to get there. Do you understand what I'm trying to tell you, Bobby?"

He looked over at me with narrowed eyes and snapped, "Sure I understand. You're trying to tell me how smart you are and how dumb I am."

My temper flared. "Damnit, it's not that way at all!" I took a deep breath, forcing myself to calm down. Calmness is important. "I'm just telling you some things that you should know

if you're going to be any good at this. Don't draw attention to yourself, don't be greedy, and do your homework. What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing. Let's just get there and get it over with, okay?" I thought for a second that I detected a welcome note of legitimate concern in his voice, but then he said, "I've got better things to do tonight, once I get some money."

I just shook my head and kept watching the road. Maybe it had been a mistake to bring him, but I felt like I owed him that much, anyway. I wanted to get him off to a good start.

We were getting into a pretty swanky residential district now. The houses had more distance between them and were set further back off the road. We were within a few blocks of the target.

I reached in the right hand pocket of my jacket and pulled out the little pistol I had put there. Holding it by the barrel, I extended it across the seat to Bobby and said, "Here."

He took it and turned it over in his hands a couple of times, then wrapped his fingers around the grip, getting the feel of it. He said, "Kind of small, isn't it?"

"It's big enough. Just put it in your pocket and leave it there. It's only for extreme emergencies. Like if somebody was about to

shoot one of us. In other words, to save our lives. Nothing else is worth a possible murder rap."

"Okay," he muttered, shoving the gun in his own pocket.

I parked the car in the shadow of a big tree some fifty yards away from the driveway of the doctor's house. I left the keys in the ignition to save time later. Bobby opened his door. I said quickly, "Don't slam it. Don't even close it all the way."

He gave me a look of slight contempt. "I know that, Alex."

"All right. Just remember everything else I told you. Let's go."

We walked as quietly as we could up the street and into the driveway. As far as I could tell, the house was dark and quiet, just as it should be. None of the servants were live-ins, another fact I had picked up during my preparation for the job, and the doctor and his wife would be out at the party. It looked like a piece of cake, just like I wanted for Bobby's first job as my partner.

It didn't take long to find a window that I could force. As I slid it up and we began to clamber inside, I knew that alarms would be ringing somewhere and that our time had started running out. A part of my mind that I had trained for this task began its automatic countdown.

I shone the beam from my little flashlight around the room. We

were in a sort of library and den, and from experience, I knew there would probably be a wall safe underneath one of the paintings. I found it under the second one I lifted.

"You know what to do," I whispered to Bobby. "Hit the other rooms. Remember, only stuff small enough to carry. I'll work on this."

He nodded, said, "Right," and ducked out through one of the room's two doors, using his own flashlight to show him the way.

The house was getting old, just like the people who lived there, and so was the safe. That was a stroke of good luck. It took me almost two of our three minutes to open it, but that left plenty of time to clean it out.

I swung the door open and flashed the light inside. There were several piles of envelopes stacked in there. I opened a few of them, seeing money and bonds and stock certificates. I shoved them into my pockets. Behind the envelopes were several little jewelry cases. When I opened them, the light flashed off diamonds and pearls.

I slid the jewelry cases into my pockets with the money and wondered where Bobby was. It was time for him to be getting back here so that we could leave. Our time would be up in less than half a minute.

Without warning, the overhead light came on.

MY EYES CLOSED against the glare and I dropped the flashlight in shock. A dry, crisp voice said, "Well, it looks like it was a good thing Martha got sick,

I started to take a step toward the window, and the voice snapped, "Don't move or I'll fire!"

My eyes were beginning to adjust. I turned very slowly toward the voice and saw a tall gaunt man with receding white hair and a little moustache of the same color. He had to be the doctor, and he handled the pistol he held as confidently and casually as he would a scalpel.

"Just stand very still," he said, "and I won't shoot."

He was standing in the other door, opposite the one through which Bobby had left. Now he stepped farther into the room, keeping the pistol level with my stomach, and picked up a telephone on a little table.

Without taking his eyes off of me, he began to dial a number by touch.

Where the hell was Bobby? If he was careful, he could get the drop on this guy and disarm him and we could still get out of here all right.

But he would have to show up soon.

So far I hadn't said anything. Talking to the doctor wouldn't do any good. The only one who could help me now was Bobby.

Two things happened at once. The doctor said into the phone, "Police? I want to report a burglary." And in the shadows beyond the door, I suddenly saw Bobby's feet come into view. They stopped and stayed motionless outside the door.

What was he waiting for? I knew he could take this old man without any trouble.

The doctor was smiling now, and he looked a lot more like an aging devil than a benevolent healer. He said into the receiver, "Yes, I caught this man pilfering my safe. I'm afraid I had to shoot him. He appears to be dead."

My eyes widened and the temperature in the room seemed to drop. I opened my mouth to say something, but the doctor gestured viciously with the gun, cutting me off. He told the phone, "Yes, I understand. I'll be waiting for you." He gave the police his name and address and hung up. I knew they were already on their way, summoned by the alarm, but that's not what worried me. It was the look on the doctor's face.

"I'm sick and tired of you punks who think you can get away with anything," he said. "I think it's time someone made an example of one of you."

Bobby still hadn't moved! What was wrong with him? He had a gun. It was suddenly very important to me to find out if he was going to use it. I cast an appealing

glance over the doctor's shoulder and through the doorway. Was he going to stand there and let this vicious old man kill me?

I couldn't afford to wait any longer. I went to one side in a rolling dive, slapping at my left hand pocket for my own gun. There was a crack as the doctor fired, missing me by a wide margin. I landed and came up in a crouch, bringing my gun up and triggering two shots as fast as I could.

The first one missed, but the second one hit him in the shoulder, knocking him backwards with a cry and sending his weapon spinning out of his hand. Bobby bolted through the door and yelled, "Let's go!" I went through the window right behind him.

We sprinted through the darkness to the car. Incredibly, my mind was still counting, and I knew only four and a half minutes had passed. We could still make our getaway, even though I could hear sirens in the night.

AS WE PILED into the car, I hit the key, starting it and putting it in gear almost in one motion. The tires squealed this time.

I had studied the neighborhood. Part of lesson three — do your homework. My knowledge of the cross streets enabled me to wheel us out of there safely, avoiding the screaming cop cars.

When we had put enough distance behind us, I slowed down

and tried to make my fingers stop gripping the steering wheel so tightly. Neither one of us had said a word so far, but I had been doing some hard thinking.

Bobby had made no move at all to save my life. He could have let that old man kill me, *then* dropped the doctor and taken all the loot for himself. It made me sad to think such a thing of him, but it sounded just like something he would do. Looking out for number one had always been his philosophy.

Finally, he said, "Hey, that was a close one, wasn't it, Alex?"

"Yeah. A real close one."

"I got some good stuff, I think. It really shook me when I went in the old lady's bedroom and found her asleep there. She never woke up while I was emptying her jewelry box and her purse, though. How did it go with you?"

"All right, until the lights came on."

Bobby seemed a lot less calm and a lot more excited now. Delayed reaction, maybe. Or he realized what could have very easily happened.

"Yeah," he replied. "That must've been pretty hairy. Wish I'd gotten there in time to help you."

So he was going to lie about it. That made me sad, too. I let his statement pass without comment.

It took us a little over half an hour to get to the old farmhouse in the country that we were sharing.

Once inside, we piled all the loot on the kitchen table.

It was a decent haul, nothing outstanding, a little over five thousand in cash and bonds, about half that much in jewelry. Not a bad night's work.

I sat across the table from Bobby and watched him run his fingers through the money and jewelry. Greed was flaring in his eyes. I knew what he was thinking.

"You did a pretty good job, didn't you, Bob?"

He had a look of smug complacency on his face now. "Yeah, I guess I handled myself all right."

"You figure you can handle anything that comes up now, don't you?"

"I think I could, yeah."

"Then what do you need me for?"

He frowned. "What are you talking about, Alex? You want to bust up the partnership already?"

My voice was more savage than I had intended it to be, but I couldn't hold it back. "Weren't you thinking the same thing? Weren't you thinking that all is better than half?"

His eyes narrowed again. "Maybe you're right, Alex. I think I've listened to your lectures long enough."

In one lithe motion, he was out of the chair and away from the table, the gun that I had given him

out and pointing at me. The muzzle never wavered as he said, "Hate to do this, Alex, but you've got a point. Who needs you?"

Calm. Calmness is important. I said, "You certainly don't, Bobby. That's why you were waiting for that doctor to kill me, to save you the trouble. You'd have had the same idea yourself, sooner or later."

He grinned. "Sooner."

"Yeah." I felt old, a hell of a lot older than Bobby. A hell of a lot older than I really was. I put my hands on the table and stood up slowly.

"Hey! Be still, Alex! Don't make this harder."

I took a deep breath. "Bobby, I'm afraid there's two more

lessons you never learned." I put my hand in my pocket and wrapped my fingers around my gun.

Bobby looked scared now. As I pulled my gun out, he squeezed the trigger of the one I had given him.

Nothing happened.

"You should always check your equipment to make sure it works," I said, raising my gun. "I removed the firing pin before I ever gave it to you. I wanted to see what you would do with a gun. Now I know. And one more thing."

The fear in his eyes had become terror.

"You should never trust anybody. Not even your big brother."

ANSWERS to Quiz:

WHO WROTE IT? on page 124

1-J 2-H 3-P 4-N

5-K 6-B 7-G 8-C

9-L 10-A 11-D 12-F

13-R 14-G 15-S 16-E

17-Q 18-T 19-M 20-I

DINNER FOR A DEAD MAN

by GARY ALEXANDER

Never Before in His Long Career as a Restaurant Critic Had Anyone Threatened Hastings with Bodily Harm. Now There Was a Maniac Out There Who Wanted to Kill Him!

BRYANT HASTINGS, *the* Bryant Hastings, the restaurant critic, sank his fork tentatively into the cheesecake and stuck a resisting layer of ice crystals. *Why didn't the manager just bring it out, box and all, and announce with a megaphone that his desserts were not fresh, that they had been delivered to him from the factory of some food conglomerate?* Hastings thought wryly.

Hastings nibbled around the glacial center, deciding that an acidulous note in tomorrow's column would be sufficient for it. After all, the major sins of this meal were behind him. The prime rib should have been shipped to a shoe factory along with the hide of the offending steer. The canned asparagus had the texture of porridge. Hastings threw down his fork in disgust and picked up his check. *Why do I abuse myself this way?* he wondered with a sigh.

Just then, the cashier called out, "Telephone call for a Mr. Bryant Hastings. Mr. Bryant Hastings."

Hastings lurched out of his chair. Nobody was supposed to know he was here. Nobody was supposed to know who he was. Anonymity, even outright secrecy, was vital to the integrity of his column.

A flustered Hastings picked up the extension in the bar and heard a muffled voice say, "You do a number on my restaurant when you review it like you do on most of them, you're a dead man."

The phone went dead before Hastings could reply. He hurried out, almost forgetting to pay for his meal. He drove straight home, glancing nervously into his mirrors.

Bryant Hastings was tall, graying, and in his forties. Some said that he had a knack for fashion. He had reviewed res-

taurants for the same newspaper for twenty years. For the past ten years, since his wife left him, he had lived alone in a small apartment. Her reasons for the divorce had been unclear, except that she was tired of him. He had a recurring dream in which she stormed out of his life during a restaurant meal they were having as part of his job, shouting at him from the door that she was sick to death of eating out with him every night, listening to his bitchy comments throughout the meal.

Hastings arrived home and, after double-checking the door lock and the window latches, poured himself three fingers of straight Scotch. Normally, he didn't expose his working tools — his palate — to something so caustic, but he was still quite shaky.

He tried to analyze who he might have offended to such a degree. Over the years, he had reviewed hundreds if not thousands of restaurants. Some of his columns were favorable; others, of course, were not. He had received backlash before from irate restaurateurs, but always in the form of letters or calls that disputed this point or that.

Hundreds of potential enemies out there, Hastings thought wearily, but I haven't a clue. And the caller tonight had not identified himself as a past enemy. He was a future enemy, if not a

crank; someone who was grinding his axe in advance, uncertain whether Hastings would ever review his place.

Hastings slept fitfully and entered his office in the morning with the sharp edges of his anxiety somewhat dulled by fatigue. He began sorting yesterday's late mail, hoping that both his fear and his antagonist would pass. He opened an envelope with no return address and unfolded a photocopy of a note that had been made from letters pasted onto paper in the manner of ransom notes. *You'll get to my place sooner or later Hastings and when you do I will kill you.*

Hastings rushed into the office of Ed Logue, his city editor. Logue was almost a self-caricature, the kind of editor you could build a TV series around: loose tie, great shocks of white hair, physique like the proverbial fireplug, stogie in the corner of his mouth, gruff demeanor but kindly and fatherly.

Hastings' relationship with Logue had always been congenial but never close. He knew that Logue, who had worked his way up from covering city hall and the police beat, considered *all* his critics as a bit effete and extraneous. Especially food critics. Logue made it no secret that he was a meat and potatoes man and that he wasn't pleased that Hastings devoted so many reviews

to the exotic and trendy. But Logue had little control over the content because it was the publisher's policy that all his reviewers were tenured like Supreme Court justices as long as they did their job, thus assuring that there would be no internal influences on their choices of subject or opinions.

More than once, only half in jest, Logue had said, "Bryant, who the hell cares about that stuff they set on fire at your table? I wish you'd go out and see if anyone in this town makes a decent cheeseburger."

Hastings told Logue his story and handed him the note.

Logue studied it behind billows of acrid smoke. He said, "Oh, I wouldn't get too concerned, Bryant. If it is a cafe owner, he doesn't know when or even if you'll come into his place. You don't even know yourself until a day or two before, then you don't tell anybody. Right?"

"Right, Ed," Hastings said, slumped into his chair. "But who knows for sure about this guy? Should I go to the police?"

Logue shook his head and said calmly, "Hold off on that, Bryant. This guy's probably just a harmless nutcase. Maybe he trailed you from the office yesterday to that restaurant. He could have done something then if he wanted to. Play it cool and he'll move on to some other demented game

when he figures out that you're not going to bite."

Logue's words were reassuring, but Hastings could have used a lot more comfort. That evening he did a new Italian restaurant. He had a pasta with veal and spinach filling, and deemed it excellent. It was dark in the dining room and the decor was pleasantly understated. Soft, vague Mediterranean music played from hidden speakers. The service was friendly and efficient. The salad greens were fresh, the dressing light and piquant. The house wine was reasonable and appropriately full-bodied.

Well done, he thought. Or was it? Was his subconscious protecting him with favorable stimuli, telling him that his madman was lurking in the kitchen? Could Bryant Hastings ever again be objective?

Hastings drank more wine than usual and left the restaurant in a sour mood. He walked around the corner to his car, which was parked in an outside lot. Scribbled on his windshield with a grease pencil was: *Bryant Hastings — the walking dead.*

Hastings drove to the nearest police precinct, squinting through the scrawled threat which he preserved for evidence. The desk sergeant was impassive when he told his story.

"You can go out there and take fingerprints," Hastings said. "I

can bring in the note for lab analysis."

The sergeant sighed. "I'm afraid those kind of clues come only on television. His grease pencil touched your windshield. I doubt if his hand did. What we'd get is prints on the last twenty gas station attendants who cleaned your glass. You can figure the letter is useless to us, too. I certainly don't condone this, Mr. Hastings, and what is happening is certainly illegal, but we can't be of much help unless he is caught in the act or we have some hard physical evidence. Do you want to file a formal complaint?"

"What good will that do?" Hastings snapped. Did this man realize that he was *the* Bryant Hastings? He concluded that the sergeant did but didn't care, having Ed Logue's tastes, the kind where a satisfying meal out was pizza in a bowling alley.

The sergeant shrugged. "Evidence we need."

"Like my corpse?" Hastings yelled as he stormed out.

Hastings considered spending the night at a motel. Thoughts of finding a severed sheep's head on his pillow raced through his mind, but he chanced staying home after checking with the manager and two tenants on the same floor about suspicious strangers. He wedged a chair against his front doorknob and another against the inside of the bedroom door.

Hastings, who liked to cook and was considering a gourmet cookbook project, had a long, elegant knife that could bone a leg of lamb as if it were butter. He placed it under his pillow. Under the other pillow that remained on his bed out of force of habit, he concealed a small, sharp hatchet that he used to chop kindling for his fireplace. Hastings gulped down a full tumbler of Scotch and slept so soundly and tranquilly he could have been in hibernation.

THE NEXT DAY, Hastings filled Ed Logue in on the latest developments. Logue volunteered to accompany him to a luncheon review, and Hastings gratefully accepted. His selection was an open-air, quasi-French establishment in a revitalized downtown mall. Formerly, the area had been a ramshackle collection of abandoned buildings and wino warrens. Now the refurbished office spaces were occupied by attorneys and other professionals. Boutiques at mall level catered to suburban housewives who didn't mind paying a little more for the "atmosphere."

Logue had the London broil, slightly perturbed that he had to settle for rice pilaf with it because they didn't offer fries or hash browns. Hastings was served a chicken liver and mushroom saute with homemade noodles. Seven-point-five on a scale of ten, he decided when he finished. But his

goblet of chablis was another matter; its quality was abysmal and it was virtually lukewarm. Last week, Hastings would have pounded "tepid vinegar" into his typewriter. Now he searched for the proper euphemism, a word or a harmless phrase that would be properly critical, yet mellow enough not to trigger the dark pathology of a lunatic. Ed Logue belched softly and gave his approval to the beer he drank from the bottle: it was cold.

Hastings hoped that he had not cringed visibly at Logue's remark. After all, he had tagged along to ride shotgun, not to offer insights. They were surveying a tray of napoleons a waitress presented when another waitress brought a telephone.

She plugged it into a jack at their table and said, "It's for you, Mr. Hastings."

Hastings recoiled into his seat back as if the instrument was a deadly reptile. "How did you know?" he stammered. "How did —"

"The caller described you and where you were sitting," the girl said sweetly.

Hastings thrust the receiver toward Logue and jabbed desperately at it with his other hand. "It's him," he said hoarsely.

Logue leaned forward and whispered, "Answer it. He's got to be nearby. This may be the break we need."

Hastings held it to his ear, his

arm close to his side in a vain effort to stop it from trembling.

It was the same as the muffled voice a few nights earlier. "It would be so easy from where I'm at now, Hastings. I wouldn't have to read your poison any more. I sure wouldn't have it done on me. One shot, creep. Bang!"

The maniac's last word was an ear-splitting yell. Hastings leaped out of his chair and threw the telephone to the pavement. He swiveled his head, scanning the brick courtyard for his would-be assassin.

Ed Logue jumped up and took his arm. "Bryant, what is it? Calm down now."

The only phone booth in sight was located directly across from them in front of a jewelry shop. The figure inside it wore blue jeans and a baggy shirt, and faced away from Hastings. "Has to be," he muttered, breaking into a run.

"Bryant," Logue yelled, taking chase.

Hastings slammed into the booth with both fists. "Come out here," he screamed. "If you're going to kill me, do it in front of all these witnesses."

A frightened young woman with short hair turned around to face her attacker. She pushed a knee against the door and cried out for help.

Logue reached Hastings and pulled him away just as he recog-

nized his error. He held him with a gentle bear hug. "Easy, Bryant, easy."

Hastings went slack and dropped to his knees, sobbing. By now, he had drawn a crowd. People interrupted their ten-dollar lunches to either stare or approach. A patrolman was attracted by the commotion, too.

The cop was a veteran Logue had known from his days of covering the chaos and mayhem downtown. Logue took him aside and minutes later had Hastings in his car, headed for the office.

Logue rarely closed his office door. He *never* locked it. He did now. He broke the seal on a bottle of twelve-year-old bourbon and filled paper cups for Hastings and himself. Logue, the father figure never lacking for dry words of wisdom, had none to offer. He refilled Hastings' cup after he had drained it in two swallows.

Finally, Hastings said, "Whether this guy is serious or not, I think it's time I stepped down. Twenty years is too long for anyone to be on the same job."

"Is that what you want, Bryant?"

"I don't think my decision will break your heart, Ed," Hastings replied. "And I doubt if I'd ever feel free to be objective again."

"It's your choice, Bryant," Logue said. "It doesn't make any difference what I want. You know the policy."

Logue asked Hastings to stay on

at the paper, offering him a job as assistant to the garden editor, explaining that there was nothing at the present for someone of his stature, but that as soon as something did open up, he'd get first crack at it.

Hastings shook Logue's hand and said he'd think about it. He stumbled out into the city room, wondering if he was too old to adapt to a move to another city and its restaurants, wondering also if he was too old to generate enthusiasm and an expertise for marigolds or whatever the hell the garden people wrote about.

Logue locked his door again. He called his nephew, who had just graduated from college with a degree in journalism.

"Hi, Bill. Yeah, it's over. You were great, but you damn near overdid it. Needless to say, you were convincing. Yeah, I know it's a rough way to work and Hastings isn't really a bad guy deep down, but he would have hung on here until they took him out on a stretcher. I've been throwing hints at him for years, but he knew he was locked in here as long as he wanted the job.

"Listen, get down here in three or four days and fill out the forms. You'll be our new restaurant critic. Which reminds me, there's this new place that has the world's greatest chiliburgers. That'll be your first assignment."

A WILL AND A WAY

You're a Detective with an Unsolved Murder on Your Hands, So What Do You Do? You Talk to a Bartender — Especially If that Bartender Is an Ex-cop with a High IQ!

by **SIDNEY RICHARDSON**

DETECTIVE SERGEANT Harry Kelso left police headquarters at 10:37 p.m. on Friday. It had been a rough week — the Captain had had him on the carpet three times already about the Davis case. He decided to walk the two blocks to Bill's Friendly Tavern for a night cap. Bill Hamilton had been Harry's partner before he quit the force. Now he was tending bar, and Kelso had been boosted to the Detective Squad.

That was irony for you, Harry thought. Maybe it would help to talk to Bill about the strangulation of Emily Davis. Here was a murder that was routine on the face of it. Kelso knew he wasn't

very smart, and he could not help feeling that he was missing something. If he didn't figure out what it was pretty soon, Captain Morgan was going to have his ass.

He pushed his way through the old-fashioned wooden framed glass doors, and followed the friendly shadows to the bar. It looked like any other neighborhood oasis, but a bit more worn around the edges. The usual crowd of half a dozen were there, watching a boxing special on the color TV at one end of the room. Kelso waved, but took a seat as far from the others as possible.

Bill drifted over to take his order. Thick-necked, muscular,

and somewhat dull of expression, Hamilton looked like everyone's concept of dumb. It was a camouflage that had worked to his advantage many times when he was still on the force. His dull expression hid a mind that was both shrewd and occasionally devious.

"Evening, Lieutenant. What can I get for you?"

I must really look beat, Kelso thought. Bill had a habit of giving you a verbal boost in rank whenever you appeared to be dispirited. "I'll have Teacher's on the rocks."

"Coming right up, Captain."

Captain! It must be showing badly. But Bill had had another clue in the drink. Harry usually stuck to beer, switching to Scotch only when he was really depressed.

Bill served another round to the sports fans before coming back with a double Scotch for Kelso. "What's on your mind? When you're not interested in a championship bout, even welterweight, you must be working on a tough one."

"You read about the Davis case in the papers, Bill? I had to be the one to catch it."

Didn't sound too complicated to me. Ordinary breaking and entering. Society dame comes home from a charity ball, early, and interrupts the burglar. He strangles her and grabs a \$50,000 emerald necklace she was wearing. He makes off with this

trinket alone, not wishing to wait around in case the struggle has been overheard by some other person in the household."

"Should be simple on the face of it, Bill. But something about the case is getting to me — and I can't even figure out what it is."

"Is there more to it than we could see in the press?"

Kelso took another sip of his Scotch. "A lot more. Emily Davis is a rich lady all right, Bill. But there was a lot more to her than that. Judging from her pictures she was very beautiful. Blond, blue-eyed, and with a pink and white complexion like a baby. You wouldn't have wanted to see her when they took her to the morgue."

"That's why I got out of the cop business, Harry. That and the way you look tonight."

"There are so many undercurrents, Bill. They should all have a meaning, if I could just get things to settle into place. I talked to her sister, Ida Rountree. She said that Emily had always been secretive. An 'introspective kind of personality' was how Ida put it. Emily enjoyed manipulating people, playing games with their lives. She . . ."

"She had the dough to get away with it."

"Yeah . . . There's another angle, too. Her husband, Franklin Davis, is President of the Unity Guaranty Trust. I understand that the auditors are very interested

in his bank. It seems that some of the funds may be missing. In fact, he was so tired from an all-night session with them the previous evening that he refused to attend the charity ball with Emily, even though he had promised her earlier that he would go. He admitted that they had a few angry words before she left. He said he was just too tired and worried about the bank, and that he took two sleeping pills and went to bed. Davis claims that he saw and heard nothing until the maid woke him in the morning and told him she'd found the body. He wouldn't have heard her come in anyway. They'd had separate sleeping quarters for some time."

Bill picked up the empty glass. "I'll freshen this and be right back."

"Have one for yourself while you're at it," Kelso called after him.

Bill served up a fresh round to the men at the other end of the bar. The fight had ended in a TKO in the third round, and a couple of them had left in disgust. The others were arguing, not about the match, but about Howard Cosell's alleged talent as an announcer. Bill made a jocular comment about Cosell's toupee as he collected for the beer. He made himself a ginger ale, and then came back to Kelso with another Scotch in his hand. This time it was not a double.

"Here you are, Lieutenant."

Bill leaned his elbows on the bar in front of Kelso. "You know just because her husband's bank is in trouble — it doesn't have to have anything to do with her death."

"No, it doesn't . . . But that's only one of the things that don't fit. The fair Emily also had a lover."

"Yeah?"

"She'd been seeing a lot of Ben Larsen, the golf pro at the Fairfax Country Club. They have been an item all summer, and into the fall. I gather he's not much more than a paid companion. For the price of a lesson, a lady can have the full attention of the muscular Mr. Larsen. Whether or not they spend their time on the links is nobody's business."

"Fairfax is pretty exclusive. Larsen? Isn't he the one who is also well-known for his ventures into pugilism? I have a friend who works out there now and again. I hear he slugged a member." Bill shook his head. "That is definitely a no-no for a paid flunky who's supposed to give golf lessons to bored housewives all day. It wasn't by chance Davis that he slugged?"

"No, Bill. It was the husband of another lady friend. Larsen got around. Matter of fact it was Emily Davis who used her influence to get him out of that mess. But that wasn't the first time he lost his temper. He's

been busted twice for disorderly conduct, and lost two other jobs for the same reason."

"Was Davis onto their affair?"

"I don't think so, Bill. I'd swear that Davis was shocked to find out about Larsen and his wife. You'd agree with me if you could have seen his face when the will was read. She'd changed it only the week before, and left almost all of her assets to Larsen. Her sister told me she'd planned to fly to Mexico for a quick divorce, in order to marry him. I guess it was true, because we found the plane ticket in her purse. But her husband denied she'd ever discussed divorce with him. Said he didn't know anything about Larsen or Mexico either. I tell you, Bill, I *believed* him. The man was almost in shock. He'd have to be an expert actor to bring off that kind of reaction. He's a pompous old fart, and I don't think he's that good a liar."

BILL GLANCED DOWN the bar, checking the level of beer in the glasses of the boxing enthusiasts. It would have been better if the fight had lasted, he thought. He decided to wait until they called for a refill. He didn't want to have a Friday night fight of his own to referee. "What about Larsen? Did he need money? Did he know about the will?"

"Who doesn't need money?" Kelso sipped his Scotch. "But Larsen *said* he didn't know about

the will. Also, he was a little startled about the possible wedding plans. I don't think that he really wanted to marry sweet Emily, but was just stringing her along. Ida Rountree overheard a quarrel between Larsen and her sister. It seems that Emily took offense at the amount of attention he was giving another lady, and mentioned her plans for divorce and designs on his future. While he didn't say outright that he wouldn't marry her if she were free, he did try to stall. Said he wanted to wait a while and think things over, before taking such a big step. Emily was livid. According to Ida, she called him a 'blond baboon.' They had quite a scene. If he'd been planning to murder her and collect on the estate, he would have been careful to play along with the marriage plans, not fighting about them in public."

"What about the MO, Lieutenant? Did the break-in fit the pattern of anyone with whom the minions of the law might have been previously acquainted?"

"No, nothing special there. The lock was forced, but any determined child of four could have done that. The locks on that mansion were a farce. You'd think that a banker would be more careful, wouldn't you, Bill?"

"Yeah. But you know how people are, Lieutenant. There is no limit to the stupidity of the

various individual fragments of humanity. If I didn't learn anything else from the cop business, I learned that."

Kelso pointed to the men at the other end of the bar. "I think they're trying to get your attention, Bill." He pushed his own empty glass across the bar toward his friend. "Get us another round, too, because you haven't heard the craziest part of this whole mess yet."

Bill distributed the beer with aplomb, and made another drink for Kelso.

Bill grinned across the bar at him. "So what's so crazy?"

"As you no doubt read in the press, all of the money was hers. Davis is a business hotshot from a lower middle-class family who whizzed his way through some obscure business school on a scholarship. He went to work for Emily's father's bank, and was supposed to have pulled it through some rough going in the last recession. Emily married him about ten years ago, Ida said the family had a fit. They felt that Davis had no 'background.'"

"What kind of scholarship? Brains or brawn?"

"I don't know . . . Anyway, when her father died Emily inherited the money. Lots of it. But the screwy thing was that she didn't let her husband manage it. After he took over the bank, she'd never let him get his hands on a cent. About half her dough was in

the hands of a top investment counseling firm, the rest was in cash and negotiable securities in her safe deposit drawer at the bank. I never heard of anyone that rich just leaving money to sit around. But her sister said she had a thing about always having enough cash on hand to do anything she wanted to do. She'd told Ida that she always wanted to have enough money to start over anywhere in the world if she wanted. She called it her 'freedom fund.'"

"How much, Harry?"

"Bill, I never saw so much dough in my life. Almost a million bucks! I was there when they executed the court order to open the box. Not just anybody with a key is allowed to get at those safe deposit boxes. You have to sign into a special room built into the bank vault, and the guards check the signatures. It's a really secure system. And that money! You should have seen it, Bill. And all of it goes to the temperamental Mr. Larsen. Unless we tab *him* for the murder like Captain Morgan wants."

"Old Morgan is an ugly bastard, Harry. He always wants to pin a homicide on the best-looking dude involved."

"I don't know about that, Bill. But this is the third case I've screwed up in a row, and I know what he'll pin on me if I don't come up with something soon . . . Crazy thing too — the emerald necklace was in there."

"The one she wore to the charity ball? The one the newspapers reported stolen . . . was in the safe deposit box?"

"Yeah."

"Did she maybe wear a paste copy to the dance? I remember from working robbery detail that lots of rich dames have copies made to wear in public. Their insurance companies are like that."

"No, her sister said that she definitely had on the real necklace the night of the party. Ida ought to know — she's always been jealous of the fact that Emily got Mama's emeralds. If she was attacked by an intruder, he didn't get the jewels. If she was murdered by someone who knew her well, a lot of planning went into making it look like a robbery. Larsen might have killed her in a rage, but I can't see him setting up the phony robbery."

"Did she stop anywhere on the way home from the party, Sarge? If you don't know could you check it out? Because if she didn't, I'd bet my Mensa card I know who killed her. And you should, too."

"No, she didn't stop. She went home in a taxi. I interviewed the driver myself." Kelso registered that he had been demoted all the way down to his rightful rank. Bill was upset with him.

"Had to be Davis, Harry. No question."

"But I told you, Davis didn't know about her affair with Larsen.

I'm sure I couldn't be wrong about that."

"Right guy, wrong reason, Sarge. The spouse's bank is in trouble and she was sitting on a million dollars. It's a good thing he's such a greedy bastard, or you'd probably never be able to nail him. I don't know whether he wanted the money to make up a deficit, or to help him get away, but he sure blew it when he put that necklace back. You'd either have to be the person who rented the box — or the president of the bank, to be able to get the jewelry in there."

"Sure. He'd have a key to get in after hours, know the combination to the vault, *and* have access to his wife's safe deposit key. Since Davis certainly expected to inherit everything, it made sense for him to replace the emeralds. If Emily hadn't changed the will, no one but himself would ever have looked into that box. No wonder he was in shock when the will was read. Where's the phone, Bill?"

Bill glanced down the bar to where the remaining beer drinkers had started to argue about whether the Ali-Liston bouts had been fixed. "Harry, you haven't changed a bit. It's right on the wall behind you. Excuse me while I go down there and change the subject to Jack Dempsey. Neither one of those bastards is old enough to want to start a fight over the Tunney long count."

WHO WROTE IT?

Many detectives of mystery fiction have achieved literary immortality for themselves and their creators. Here are some of these detectives listed in the left-hand column. See if you can match them up with their authors in the right-hand column.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Arsène Lupin | A. Georges Simenon |
| 2. Bertha Cool | B. Chester Gould |
| 3. Boston Blackie | C. Frederic Dannay & Manfred Lee |
| 4. Bulldog Drummond | D. Craig Rice |
| 5. Charlie Chan | E. Dsahiehl Hammett |
| 6. Dick Tracy | F. Ross Macdonald |
| 7. Dr. Gideon Fell | G. Richard & Francis Lockridge |
| 8. Ellery Queen | H. A. A. Fair |
| 9. Hercule Poirot | I. Leslie Charteris |
| 10. Inspector Maigret | J. Maurice Leblanc |
| 11. John J. Malone | K. Earl Derr Biggers |
| 12. Lew Archer | L. Agatha Christie |
| 13. Mr. Moto | M. S.S. Van Dine |
| 14. Mr. & Mrs. North | N. Herman Cyril McNeile |
| 15. Nero Wolfe | O. John Dickson Carr |
| 16. Nick Charles | P. Jack Boyle |
| 17. Lord Peter Wimsey | Q. Dorothy Sayers |
| 18. Philip Marlowe | R. John P. Marquand |
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Answers on page 111

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STIFF COMPETITION

by JOHN BALL

The literature of crime is well populated by strippers, most of whom give at least one performance with the reader present before they are piously murdered in the public weal. In *Spence at the Blue Bazaar* we meet Thana, the international class *artiste* who, as far as we know, is unique in mystery fiction. She is certainly some lady, and her demise, unfortunately, is no more than she deserves. While the murderer is not too hard to spot, this is a lively and readable British police procedural in the great Maurice Procter tradition. Detective Chief Superintendent Ben Spence appeared in a previous book called *Spence and the Holiday Murders*, which we regret having missed. Michael Allen, the author, will bear close watching. (Walker, \$7.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

There is nothing about *Lions at Night* by Richard Himmel to

suggest an espionage novel, but that is what it is. For once the CIA is not a whipping boy as agent Ross Edgerton does his job in a highly professional way, even though his cover includes posing nude for *Playgirl*. A cache of great wealth secreted in Cuba at the end of the Batista regime is sought by a Mafia don while an American undersecretary sees an opportunity to make himself appear as a hero. The story is played out through most of the Caribbean with some moments of riveting excitement and tension. The continuous sex, however, is like a persistent woodpecker when you're trying to get some sleep. There are several forces pulling back and forth, two overly ambitious women, mercenaries, homosexuals, ruthless politicians, and others, the best of whom is a young Italian aide to the don who rapes and murders with equal proficiency.

He is some boy, and the author

has made him live. (Delacorte, \$9.95)

☆☆☆

One of the genuine delights of mystery literature is the work of Edmund Crispin, now most regretably terminated. Crispin was, in actuality, Oxford Don Bruce Montgomery, the same man who made a considerable reputation as a composer of motion picture scores. His detective, Oxfordian Gervase Fen, is a wit, pundit, and all around person who moved in a world not too far removed from Alice in Wonderland. Now Walker and Company is performing a real service in reprinting the Crispin classics in fresh new editions; the first of these to reappear is *The Case of the Gilded Fly*. This is the one in which a tavern parrot, if addressed in French, will respond by quoting German poets in the original. Think of having a nice afternoon drink with a soft and engaging companion while from overhead comes a squawking: "*Ich weiss night, was soll es bedeuten, dass ich so traurig bin.*" Welcome to the world of Edmund Crispin, and don't delay your visit. (Walker and Co., \$8.95).

☆☆☆

John Wyllie writes of an Africa far removed from the fanciful ones of H. Rider Haggard and Edgar Rice Burroughs or the realistic South Africa of James McClure. The west Africa that the author obviously knows intimately is a

different, colorful, and at times terrifying place where Dr. Quarshie practices medicine while he is not engaged in solving crimes. The doctor, his resourceful wife, and those who surround him are presumably black, but the author never comes out and says so: they are simply people caught up in an environment of ancient tradition mixed with contemporary politics and affairs. Dr. Quarshie's resources are called on in *The Killer Breath*, the latest in the series in which he is featured. It is a good example of the expanded scope of detective fiction written by an obvious specialist. Africa is not a new *mise en scene*, as witness the work of Matthew Head, but this particular Africa comes at the reader off every page. Unusual and highly engaging. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$7.95)

☆☆☆

The Edge of the Tightrope by John H. Drew is a novel of international terrorism and its aftermath. The author writes in a short, clipped style that is a little troublesome at first, but as he unfolds his story the terseness fits the action, and there is plenty of that. One-time terrorist Mike McCoy pulls up short when things go beyond what he can tolerate, and he informs the government of a planned hijacking — an obvious reference to the Entebbe Raid. The story begins when he is on the

run well after the event and comes up against both the terrorists he has betrayed and the government men who want to keep a deadly secret safe. There is violence, blood, a measure of sex, and one very tough man who won't give up without a fight. Once started, a very hard book to put down and the deductive reasoning is valid throughout. From an interesting new publisher, Communication Creativity of La Jolla, California. \$7.95

☆☆☆

Although she died more than two decades ago, Dorothy L. Sayers (who always insisted on her middle initial) was a remarkable personality and a genuine scholar of distinction, in addition to being the author of the Lord Peter Winsey mysteries. The first biography of her to appear was widely regarded as inadequate. It placed great stress on her being a "strange lady," an opinion that does her much less than justice. Miss Sayers was a large woman who frequently wore mannish clothes, but her diaries review a young girl with her full quota of adolescent crushes, who subsequently went on to achieve a major success as a novelist, theologian, and translator of medieval literature. The first biography is now replaced by a new one that is markedly superior, *Dorothy L. Sayers: a Literary Biography* by Ralph E. Hone. Dr.

Hone, who is on the faculty at the University of Redlands in California, has done a careful, meticulous job of research and presents his results in a clear and readable manner. In contrast to the earlier effort, Dr. Hone has kept things in proportion. The fact that Miss Sayers bore a son prior to her marriage is not sensationalized, but is treated with the dignity that the lady deserves. During her confinement she gave her true name and stated her occupation without evasion, something to be admired.

Although women have from the beginning occupied a prominent place in mystery and crime writing, as witness Green, Rinehart, Wells, Southworth, and many others, Miss Sayers to a considerable degree occupied a man's world. She went to Oxford at a time when females were not admitted to degrees by that august institution, yet later became one of the first of her sex to receive the honor she had earned. She wrote effectively on religion, contributed brilliantly to the literature of Sherlock Holmes (she made the remarkable deduction that Dr. Watson's middle name was Hamish), and was engaged in a new translation of Dante at the time of her death. Professor Hone has now given us a notable biography which may well prove to be, in Dr. Watson's revered words, "the last word on the subject." (Kent State University Press, \$15.00)

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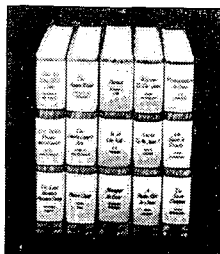
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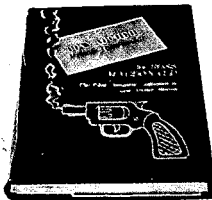
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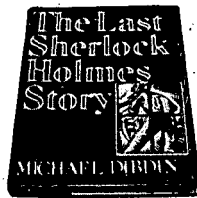
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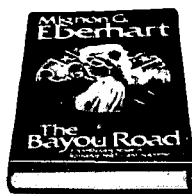
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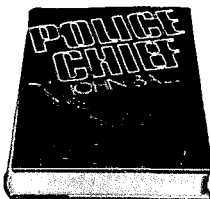
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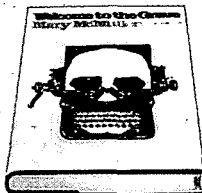
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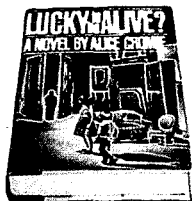
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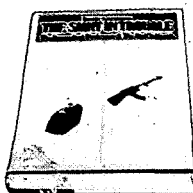
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